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UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

VOL. III.

UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

A Story.

BY

T. W. SPEIGHT,

AUTHOR OF "BROUGHT TO LIGHT," "FOOLISH MARGARET," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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CONTENTS

OF

THE THIRD VOLUME.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE THIRD REPORT CONTINUED . . .	1
II.	GEORGE STRICKLAND'S QUEST	21
III.	AT THE "ROYAL GEORGE."	51
IV.	A LITTLE DINNER FOR THREE	72
V.	CLEON REDIVIVUS	89
VI.	PASTILLE-BURNING	99
VII.	CHASING "LA BELLE ROSE"	123
VIII.	THE CAVE OF ST. LAZARE	143
IX.	THE VERDICT OF MR. VERMUSEN . . .	153
X.	HAUNTED	172

CHAP. PAGE

XI. THE ARRIVAL OF THE DIAMOND AT DUPLEY WALLS 193

XII. DE MORTUIS NIL NISI BONUM 208

XIII. THE DEPARTURE OF SIR JOHN POLLEXFEN 219

XIV. THE TARN OF BEN DULAS 231

XV. ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL 253

UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

CHAPTER I.

THE THIRD REPORT CONTINUED.

"Five minutes later, Captain Ducie and your hopeful son slunk out of Bon Repos like the thieves we were, and treading the gravelled pathway as carefully as two Indians on the war-trail might have done, we came presently to the margin of the starlit lake. There was no lack of boats at Bon Repos, and soon I was pulling over the quiet mere in the direction of Bowness. We managed to find the little pier without much difficulty. There we disembarked, and then chained up the boat and left it. By this time the first faint streaks of day were brightening in the east. There would be no train from

Bowness for three or four hours. Captain Ducie's impatience could not brook such a delay. At his request I roused the people at one of the hotels. Even then we had to stand kicking our heels for half an hour before a conveyance and pair of horses could be got ready for us. But when we were once fairly under way, no grass was suffered to grow under our horses' feet. The captain's object was to catch one of the fast up trains at Oxenholme Junction, some fourteen miles away. This we succeeded in doing, with a quarter of an hour to spare. A portion of that quarter of an hour was occupied by me in sending a certain telegram to my respected *pater*. The day was still young when Captain Ducie and I alighted at Euston-square.

"I did not know whether it was the captain's intention to give me my congé as soon as we should reach town, but I certainly knew that it was not my intention to part from him quite so readily. He had insisted on my travelling up in the same carriage with himself, and I had had the free run of his cognac and cigars. During

the early part of the journey he had been silent and thoughtful, but by no means morose. As the morning advanced, however, his shoulder had begun to pain him greatly, and by the time we reached London I could see, although he uttered no complaint, that the agony was almost more than he could bear. Consequently, I was not surprised as I helped him to alight from the railway carriage, to hear him say:—

"'Jasmin, my good fellow, I find that it will not do for me to part from you just yet. This confounded shoulder of mine seems as if it were going to make a nuisance of itself. You must order a cab and go with me. I will make your excuses to M. Platzoff.'

"'Right you are, sir,' said I. 'Where shall I tell cabby to drive to?'

"'To the Salisbury Hotel, Fleet-street.'

"Captain Ducie was such an undoubted West-end swell that I was rather surprised to find him going east of Temple Bar. But my place was to obey, and not to question his behests.

"'Get into the cab: I want to talk to you,'

said he. 'On one or two points it will be requisite that I should take you into my confidence,' he began, as soon as we were out of the station. 'And I have less hesitation in doing this because, from what I have seen of you, I believe you to be a perfectly trustworthy and straightforward fellow.'

"'It is very kind of you to say so, sir,' I answered respectfully.

"'Now, for certain reasons which I need not detail, I do not want my presence in London to be known to any one. I am going to an hotel where I have never been before, and where I am entirely unknown. While stopping at this hotel I shall pass under the name of Mr. Stonor, a country gentleman—let us say—of limited means, who is up in town for the furtherance of some business of a legal character. Can you remember Mr. Stonor from the country?'

"'I shall not forget it, sir—you may trust me for that.'

"'Yes, if I had not felt that I could trust you, I should not have brought you so far,

nor have taken you so deeply into my confidence.'

"Father! for the first time these dozen years your son blushed.

"On reaching the hotel Mr. Stonor seemed to care little or nothing about the size or comfort of the rooms that were shown him. He was particular on one point only. That point was the fastening of his bedroom door.

"After rejecting three or four rooms in succession he chose one that had a stouter lock than ordinary, and that could be reached only through another room. In this other room it was arranged that I should sleep, so that no one could obtain access to Mr. Stonor without first disturbing me.

"Is not this another proof that I acted judiciously in leaving Bon Repos, and that Captain Ducie, above all men in the world, is the man I ought to stick to?

"We had no sooner settled about the rooms than Captain Ducie was obliged to go to bed. He

would not allow me to help him off with any other article of dress than his outer coat. Then he sent me for a doctor, and when the doctor and I got back he was in bed. The doctor pronounced the wound in his shoulder to be not a dangerous one, but one that would necessitate much care and attention. The captain was condemned to stay in bed for at least a week to come.

"There is no occasion to weary you with too many details. A week—ten days, passed away and I still remained in attendance on Captain Ducie. For the first four or five days he did not progress much towards recovery. He was too fidgety, too anxious in his mind, to get well. I knew the form which his anxiety had taken when I saw how impatient he was each morning till he had got the newspaper in his fingers, and could be left alone to wade through it. At the end of an hour or so he would ring his bell, and would tell me with a weary look, to take 'that cursed newspaper' away.

"I was just as impatient for the newspaper as he was, and did not fail to submit its

contents each morning to a most painstaking search.

"After the sixth day there was a decided improvement in the condition of Captain Ducie, and from that date he progressed rapidly towards recovery. It was on the sixth day that my search through the newspaper was rewarded by finding a paragraph that interested me almost as much as it must have interested Captain Ducie. The paragraph in question was in the shape of an extract from *The Westmoreland Gazette,* and ran as under :—

"'*The Dangers of Opium-smoking.*—We have to record the sudden death of M. Paul Platzoff, a Russian gentleman of fortune, who has resided for several years on the banks of Windermere. M. Platzoff was found dead in bed on the morning of Wednesday last. From the evidence given at the inquest it would appear that the unfortunate gentleman had been accustomed for years to a frequent indulgence in the pernicious habit of opium-smoking, and the medical testi-

mony went to prove that he must have died while in one of those trances which make up the opium-smoker's elysium. At the same time, it is but just to observe that had not the post-mortem examination revealed the fact of there having been heart-disease of long standing, the mere fact of the deceased gentleman having been addicted to opium-smoking would not of itself have been sufficient to account for his sudden death.'

"There are one or two facts to be noted in connexion with the foregoing account. In the first place, it is there stated that M. Platzoff was found dead in bed. When I saw him soon after midnight, he lay dead on the divan in the smoke-room. But it is possible, that the use of the word 'bed' in the newspaper account may be a mere verbal inaccuracy. In the second place, there is not a word said respecting Cleon. Now, had the valet disappeared precisely at the time of M. Platzoff's mysterious death, suspicion of some sort would have been sure to attach to

him, and an inquiry would have been set on foot respecting his whereabouts. Such being the case, the natural conclusions to be derived from the facts as known to us would seem to be: First, that Cleon was not out of the way when the body was found, and that the statements made at the inquest as to the habits of the deceased were made by him, and by him alone. Secondly, if any fracas took place between Cleon and Captain Ducie on that fatal night, as there is every reason to suspect, the mulatto has not seen fit to make any public mention of it. Captain Ducie's name, in fact, does not seem to have been once mentioned in connexion with the affair, and if Cleon either knows or suspects that the captain has the Great Diamond in his possession, he has doubtless had good reasons of his own for keeping the knowledge to himself. That some curious underhand game has been played between him and the captain there cannot, I think, be any reasonable doubt.

"As soon as I had read the paragraph above quoted, I took the newspaper up to Captain

Ducie, and pointed out the lines to him as if I had accidentally come across them. I wanted to hear what he would have to say about the death of Platzoff.

"'Some strange news here, sir, about M. Platzoff,' I said. 'Here is an account of——.'

"He interrupted me with a wave of his hand. 'I have seen it, Jasmin, I have seen it, and terribly shocked I was to have such news of my friend. So strangely sudden, too! I always suspected that he would do himself an injury with that beastly drug which he would persist in smoking, but I never dreamed of anything so terrible as this. I suppose it will be requisite for you to go down to Bon Repos for a time, Jasmin. There will be your wages, and your luggage and things to look after. What articles of mine were left behind I make you a present of. I hope to be sufficiently recovered in the course of three or four days to be able to spare you, and I will of course pay your fare back to Westmoreland, and remunerate you for the time you have been in my service. For myself, I

intend spending the next few months somewhere on the Continent.'

"I replied that I was in no hurry to go down to Bon Repos; that, indeed, there was no particular necessity for me to go at all; that the amount due to me for wages was very trifling, and that my clothes and other things would no doubt be forwarded by Cleon to any address I might choose to send him.

"But the captain would not hear of this. I must go down to Bon Repos and look after my interests on the spot, he said; and he would arrange to spare me in a few days. His motive for taking such a special interest in my affairs was not difficult to discover. He wanted thoroughly to break the link between himself and me. By sending me down to Bon Repos he would secure two or three clear days in which to complete whatever arrangements he might think necessary, and would, besides, insure himself from being watched or spied upon by me. Not that he doubted my fidelity in the least, but it seemed to me that of late he had grown suspicious of

everybody; and, in any case, he was desirous of severing even the faintest tie that connected him in any way with M. Platzoff and Bon Repos. Such, at least, was the conclusion at which I arrived in my own mind. But it may have been an erroneous one.

"Although Captain Ducie was desirous of getting rid of me, I did not mean to lose sight of him quite so readily. Each day that passed over my head confirmed me more fully in my belief that he had the Great Mogul Diamond concealed somewhere about his person. I had no one strong positive bit of evidence on which to base such a belief. It was rather by the aggregation of a hundred minute points all tending one way that I was enabled to build up my suspicions into a certainty.

"If he had made himself master of the Diamond, he had done so illegally. He had stolen the gem, and I should have felt no more compunction in dispossessing him of it than I should have felt in picking a sovereign out of the gutter. But the prospect of making the gem my own

seemed even more remote now, if that were possible, than when I was at Bon Repos. Nothing went farther towards confirming my belief that the captain had the Diamond by him than the fact of his taking so many and such unusual precautions to insure himself against a surprise from any one either by day or night. As already stated, I slept in the room that opened immediately out of his, so that no one could reach him except by passing through my room. Then, he always slept with the door of his bedroom double locked, and with his face turned to the window, the blind pertaining to which was drawn to the top, leaving the view clear and unobstructed. In addition, Captain Ducie always kept a loaded revolver under his pillow, and I had heard too much of his skill with that weapon to doubt that he would make an efficient use of it should such a need ever arise. What chance, then, did there seem for ce pauvre Jacques ever being able to coax the Diamond out of the hands of this man, who had no more right to it than had the Grand Turk? Still, I put a good face

on the matter, and would not allow myself to despair.

"After the sixth day Captain Ducie improved rapidly. On the tenth day he said to me: 'This is the last day that I shall require your services. You had better arrange to start by the nine forty-five train to-morrow morning for Windermere.'

"The captain was not the sort of man to whom one could say that one did not want to go to Windermere, that one had no intention of going there. The slightest opposition from an inferior in position only confirmed him the more obstinately in his own views. All, therefore, that I said was: 'I am entirely at your service, sir, to go or stay as may suit you best.' All the same, I had no intention of going.

"What I intended was to bid farewell to Captain Ducie, take a cab to the station, go quietly in at one gate and out at another. But the captain spoiled this little plan next morning by announcing his intention of going with me to the station. He was evidently anxious to see with his own

eyes that I really left London, and this of course only made me the more determined not to go. I had only a few minutes in which to make my arrangements. It was necessary that I should take some one at least partially into my confidence, and I could think of no one who would suit my purpose better than Dickson, the one-eyed night-porter at the hotel. He was fast asleep in bed at that hour of the morning, but I went up to his room and roused him. He was a quick-witted fellow enough where anything crooked was concerned, while in the simple straightforward matters of daily life he was often unaccountably stupid. His one eye gleamed brightly when I put half a sovereign into his hand, and told him what I wanted him to do for me. I left him fully satisfied that he would do it.

"A cab was ordered, my modest portmanteau was tossed on to the roof, Captain Ducie was shut up inside, and with myself on the box beside the driver, away we rattled to Euston-square. The captain went himself and took a ticket for me to

Windermere. He had already given me a handsome douceur in return for my services from the date of our leaving Bon Repos. He now saw me safely into the carriage, gave me my ticket, and nodded a kindly farewell. He did not move from his post on the platform till he saw the train fairly under way. So parted Captain Ducie and your unworthy son.

"At Wolverton, which was the first station at which the train stopped, I got out and gave up my ticket, with a pretence to the railway people that I had unfortunately left some important papers in town and that I must go back by the first train. Back I went accordingly, and reached Euston station in less than five hours after I had left it.

"My first object was to thoroughly disguise myself: no very difficult task to a person of my profession. My first visit was to the peruquier of the Royal Tabard. Here I was dispossessed of the charming little imperial which I had been cultivating for the last month or two, and from which I did not part without a pang of regret.

Next, I had my hair cut very close, and was fitted with a jet-black wig that could be termed nothing less than a triumph of mind over matter. When my eyebrows had been dyed to match, and when I had purchased and put on a pair of cheap spectacles, and had arrayed myself in a suit of ultra-respectable black, I felt that I could defy the keen eyes of Captain Ducie with impunity. Having exchanged my portmanteau for one of a different size and colour, I took a cab, and drove boldly to the Salisbury Hotel. It was satisfactory to find that Dickson passed me without recognising me, and I shall never forget the puzzled look that came into the fellow's face when I took him on one side and asked him for news of the captain.

"The captain had ordered his bill, Dickson told me when he had sufficiently recovered from his surprise, and had himself packed his own luggage, but without addressing it. A cab was to be in readiness for him at half-past eight that evening. I ordered a second cab to be in waiting for me at the corner of the street at the same

hour. Meanwhile I kept carefully out of the captain's way.

"At 8.35 p.m. my cab was following that of the captain down the Strand, and in a little while we both drew up at the Waterloo terminus. Ducie's luggage consisted of one large portmanteau only, which the cabman handed over to one of the porters.

"'Where shall I label your luggage for, sir?' asked the man: it was too large to be taken into the carriage.

"The captain hesitated for a moment, while the man waited with his paste-can in his hand.

"'For Jersey,' he said at last.

"'Right you are, sir,' said the man. 'Bill, a Jersey label.'

"I went at once and secured a ticket for that charming little spot.

"I did not lose sight of the captain till I saw him fairly seated in his carriage and locked up by the guard. I travelled down in the next compartment but one.

"I need not detain you with any account of our journey by rail, nor of our after-voyage from Southampton to St. Helier.

"The fact of my dating this communication from a Jersey hotel is a sufficient proof of my safe arrival. We reached here yesterday afternoon, the captain never suspecting for a moment that he had James Jasmin, his ex-valet, for a fellow-passenger. We are lodged at different hotels, but the one at which I am staying is so nearly opposite that of the captain, and has so excellent a view into the private sitting-room where he has taken up his quarters, that I see almost as much of him, both indoors and out, as I did during the time I acted as his valet. His reasons for coming here are best known to himself; but be they what they may, I do not feel inclined to alter my opinion one jot that he has brought the G. M. D. to this place with him.

"Whether, after all this time and trouble, I am any nearer the object for the attainment of which you first engaged me, remains for you to judge. In any case, send me instructions; tell me what

I am to do or attempt next. Or do what would be infinitely better—come here in person, and talk over the affair with

"Your affectionate son,

"James Madgin."

CHAPTER II.

GEORGE STRICKLAND'S QUEST.

The strange story told by Sister Agnes in her confession, when combined with her hinted suspicion that the account of Mr. Fairfax's death had no foundation in fact, opened up a series of questions which, under any circumstances, Janet would have felt herself incompetent to deal with alone. Major Strickland was the person of all others to whom she would have gone for counsel and assistance, even had no injunction been laid on her to that effect. That with him should be associated Father Spiridion, could only be another source of gratulation to Janet. She had learned to love and reverence the kindly old man before, but now that she knew him to have been her mother's constant friend and adviser through

many years of trouble, he seemed to have a thousand more claims on her affection. Into his hands and those of Major Strickland she committed her cause without reservation, feeling and knowing that they would do the same by her as if she were a child of their own.

It was in her relations towards Lady Pollexfen that Janet felt most the burden of the secret that had been laid upon her. To know that she was the granddaughter of that imperious old woman, and yet to be supposed not to be aware of the fact; to be able to walk down the long, dim picture gallery at Dupley Walls, and say with a proud swelling of the heart, "These were my ancestors;" to look up from the garden at the gray old pile, and then away across the wide-stretching park, and hear the unbidden whisper at her heart, "This is my rightful home:"—in all this there was for Janet a strange sort of fascination which she could not overcome. But even had she not been bound by her promise to Sister Agnes not to reveal to Lady Pollexfen what had been told her, there was a

sufficiency of stubborn pride in her composition to keep her from ever acquainting the mistress of Dupley Walls with her knowledge of a fact which that lady had persistently ignored for so many years. As simple Janet Holme she would go on till the end of the chapter, unless Lady Pollexfen should herself break the seal of silence and acknowledge her as the daughter of the woman she had so cruelly wronged.

One of Major Strickland's first acts in his capacity of adviser to Miss Holme, was to ask permission to make a confidant of his nephew, Captain George, in all that related to his young ward's affairs. The request was granted as a matter of course. Had it been made in behalf of any other than George Strickland, it would have been at once acceded to, but with how much greater pleasure in his case, Janet herself could alone have told. Between Janet and Captain Strickland there had not been the remotest attempt at love-making in the common acceptation of the phrase; and yet, by one of Love's subtle intuitions, each read the other's

heart, and knew of the sweet secret that lay hidden there. Any intentions that Captain George might have formed in his own mind as to the propriety, or necessity, of making mention of his love to her whom it most concerned, were put aside for the time being in consequence of the death of Sister Agnes. He only laid them aside for a little while, because, as far as he then knew, there was no relationship between Sister Agnes and Janet. But when he came to learn from his uncle, as he was not long in doing, that Miss Holme was the daughter of Sister Agnes and the granddaughter of Lady Pollexfen, he was obliged to thrust his intentions very far into the background, and it seemed doubtful to him whether they would not have to remain there for ever. The granddaughter of Lady Pollexfen was a very different person from Miss Janet Holme, with no prospects to speak of, and not a penny, beyond her quarter's salary, to call her own. To have wedded the Miss Holme he had supposed Janet to be, would have made the happiness of his life; but to propose to Miss

Holme as he now knew her was a very different affair. Captain Strickland was a poor man, but his pride was equal to his poverty; and to marry Lady Pollexfen's granddaughter without Lady Pollexfen's consent was more than that pride would allow him to do. Happily, the future might reveal to him some plan, by means of which his love and his pride might be reconciled, and walk together hand in hand. Till that time should come, if come it ever did, his love should remain hidden and dumb.

It was not till nearly a fortnight after the reading of Sister Agnes's Confession that any decision was arrived at by Major Strickland and Father Spiridion as to what steps, if any, should be taken with the view of unravelling the mystery in which the antecedents and fate of Mr. Fairfax were involved. The old soldier and the older priest, with Captain George to strengthen their consultations, met again and again, and discussed the question, as far as the data they had to go upon would allow of it, from every possible point of view. They all felt

that underneath the veil which they longed and yet were half afraid to lift, might be hidden some disgraceful story, some dark mystery, which it were better that neither they nor any one should become acquainted with. For Janet never to know who her father really was, and to remain in doubt as to whether he were alive or dead, might be painful to her feelings as a daughter, but for her to learn the truth might be more painful still. From Janet no positive expression of opinion could be elicited. She would be guided, she said, entirely by the wishes of those to whom the affair had been submitted. If they decided that no action whatever had better be taken in the matter, she was quite content to let it rest where it did. If, on the other hand, an investigation were decided upon, she would not shrink from an exposition of the truth, however painful it might be.

At length a definite course of action was resolved upon by the three gentlemen, and Major Strickland wrote to Janet by post:—

"Meet me at the King's Oak to-morrow afternoon at three.

"Bring with you the certificate and the miniature."

Janet was there at the time appointed, and there she found the major and Captain George.

"I have asked you to meet me here," said the major after the usual greetings were over, "to inform you that Father Spiridion and myself have decided that, with your permission, an investigation ought to be made into the circumstances connected with your mother's marriage, and the supposed death of your father. We think that it would be in accordance with your mother's secret wishes that such an investigation should be entered upon after her death, and we think that, in justice to yourself, the mystery, if mystery there be, should be cleared up and set at rest for ever."

"You have my full and entire sanction to whatever plan of proceeding you may think most advisable," said Janet.

"In that case," resumed the major, "George here shall start for Cumberland to-morrow morning, for it is there that our investigation must begin. Father Spiridion and I are both old men. George is young, active, and energetic, and imbued with a thorough zeal for the furtherance of your interests. Have you sufficient confidence in him to entrust your cause into his hands?"

"My cause could not be in safer keeping," said Janet with a blush and a smile. "I already owe my life to Captain Strickland. To that obligation he is now about to add another. How shall I ever be able to repay him, and you, and dear Father Spiridion, the thousand kindnesses I have received at your hands? Indeed, and indeed, I never can repay you!"

Janet's eyes as she ceased speaking went up shyly to those of Captain George. In the deep, earnest gaze of the young soldier she read something that caused her to tremble and blush for the second time, something that seemed to say,

"There is one way, and one only, by which you can repay me."

"Tut! tut! poverina mia," said the major, with a flourish of his malacca, "we are all three your bounden slaves, and never so happy as when we are fulfilling your behests. We will go back a part of the way with you, only we must not let her ladyship's lynx eyes see us together, or she will suspect that we are hatching some conspiracy. Last time you were at my house I had some difficulty in gaining her permission to allow you to come."

Captain George offered Janet his arm. The major walked beside them, flourishing his cane, aud talking on a score of different topics. So they went slowly through the sunlit park, back towards gray old Dupley Walls. George and Janet were mostly silent. What little they did say was nearly all addressed to the major: they scarcely spoke a word directly to each other. Still, strange to relate, they both afterwards declared to themselves that they had never had a more delightful walk in their lives.

Early next morning Captain Strickland started for Cumberland. There was an unwonted feeling of sadness at his heart which he could not overcome. He knew that if his quest were successful in the way his uncle and Father Spiridion hoped it would be, he and Janet would in all probability be farther divided than they were now. That is to say, if Miss Holme's father should prove to have been a man of family, or simply a very rich man, it was not improbable that his relatives might wish to claim her, in which case she would be lost to him for ever; and even the consolation of seeing her occasionally, on which he could count so long as she remained at Dupley Walls, would be his no longer. Such thoughts as these, however, would have no deterrent effect on his actions. He was fully determined to do all that lay in his power to bring the task that had been laid upon him to a successful issue. It had been decided that should Captain Strickland's investigation bring to light any facts in connexion with her father, which it would be better for Janet's happiness and peace of mind that she

should never know, such facts should be carefully withheld from her. Major Strickland and Father Spiridion reserved to themselves a certain discretionary power as to what should be told her, and what had better remain unsaid.

Before Captain Strickland had been two hours in Whitehaven he had hunted out the little church where the marriage of Edmund Fairfax and Helena Holme Pollexfen had been solemnized twenty years before. He compared the certificate he had brought with him with the original entry in the register, and he found them to tally in every particular. He inquired here and there till he had ferreted out the daughter of the woman who had been pew-opener at the church a quarter of a century before, and had been one of the witnesses to the marriage; but the woman herself had been dead a dozen years.

When he had got so far, Captain Strickland went back to his hotel and ordered a bed for the night. Whitehaven could furnish him with no further information. On the morrow he must go to Beckley. One important point had been

proved: that the certificate in his possession was a bona fide copy of the register.

As soon as breakfast was over next morning he took a post-chaise and was driven to Beckley. It was eleven miles away, but there was no difficulty in finding the place. Since the date of Miss Pollexfen's residence there, quite a little hamlet had sprung up close by in connexion with some extensive iron-ore works which had now been in operation for several years. Beckley Grange was now tenanted by the manager of these works. Miss Bellenden, the aunt with whom Miss Pollexfen had lived for so long a time, and from whose house she had run away to get married, had been dead these eighteen years. Captain Strickland was shown her tombstone in the village church.

He had not expected to pick up much information that would be of use to him at Beckley; it can hardly therefore be said that he was disappointed at finding every trace, except the epitaph, of a past state of things so entirely swept away. There was not even an old servant

to be found, with a memory that would stretch back for a quarter of a century, from whom he might have gathered some reminiscences of Miss Pollexfen's life at Beckley, such as would have had a special interest for Janet, although they might have had no bearing whatever on the case he, Captain George, had in hand.

Sister Agnes, in her Confession, had made no mention by name of the particular village or place at which Mr. Fairfax was staying at the time he made her acquaintance. Consequently for Captain Strickland to have gone inquiring among all the villages in the district respecting a certain Mr. Fairfax who might or who might not have lived there for a few weeks some twenty years ago, would have been an almost hopeless task, and one that need not be resorted to till every other chance should have failed. The person called Captain Lant in the Confession, and he alone, if he were still alive, could clear up the mystery in a few words.

The first point was, where to find Captain

Lant. The second, whether, when found, he would tell all that he was wanted to tell.

Captain Strickland left Whitehaven next day by express train for London. The first thing he did after reaching town was to deposit his portmanteau at the station hotel and then take a Hansom to his old club, the Janus, where he was sure to meet several brothers in the profession of arms to whom he was well known. After dining he went to consult some files of Army Lists. In a List twenty years old he found the name of a Captain Lant as belonging to the two-hundred-and-fourth regiment, at that time in garrison at Portsmouth.

Captain Strickland belonged to a younger generation of military men than that which had been in vogue at the Janus twenty years previously. But the father of one of his most particular friends was not only an old military man, but an old club man and bon vivant into the bargain—a man who knew something good or bad—generally the latter—about everybody of note for the last quarter

of a century. To this gentleman went Captain George. After explaining that he wanted to find out whether Captain Lant, who, twenty years previously, had belonged to the two-hundred-and-fourth Foot, were still alive, and if so where he could be found—he asked the favour of the old soldier's advice and assistance.

After turning the matter over in his mind for two or three minutes, the old gentleman said: "Put down on a slip of paper the particulars of what you want to know, and leave the case in my hands. You shall hear from me, one way or another, in the course of a few days."

Three days passed away without bringing any news, but on the morning of the fourth Captain George found the following note at his club:

"Major Gregson presents his compliments to Captain Strickland, and begs to inform him that Captain (afterwards Colonel) Lant, formerly of the two-hundred-and-fourth Foot, is still

living. Colonel Lant's present residence is Higham Lodge, near Richmond, Surrey."

Captain George suffered no grass to grow under his feet. That very afternoon he set out in quest of Higham Lodge. It was about two miles from Richmond, and he found it without difficulty. The footman who answered his ring told him that Colonel Lant was at home, but was only just recovering from a dangerous attack of gastric fever, and would hardly see any stranger at present. All the same, he would take Captain Strickland's card to his master.

Presently he returned. Colonel Lant would see Captain Strickland. So George followed the footman across the hall and up the wide shallow staircase, and was ushered into the sick man's room.

"Good morning, sir," said Colonel Lant—a white-haired sharp-featured man, with a brick-dust complexion that was somewhat toned down at present by illness—"a brother in arms

is always welcome. Had you belonged to any other profession I had not seen you."

"I must apologize for my intrusion," said Captain Strickland. "Had I been aware that you were ill I would have put off my visit till a future date. My errand, in fact, is entirely of a private nature, and is not so pressing but that it will stand over till another time. With your permission, I will call upon you again this day week or fortnight."

"Not a bit of it, my boy, not a bit of it," said the colonel. "Now that you are here, we may as well cook your goose and have done with you. May I inquire as to the particular object which has brought you so far from town?"

"My object was to ask you whether, once upon a time—say twenty years ago—you were acquainted with a gentleman of the name of Fairfax—Mr. Edmund Fairfax, to be precise?"

The sick man coughed uneasily, raised himself on one elbow, and stared fixedly at his visitor. "And pray, sir, what may be your

object in asking such a question?" he said at length.

"That I will tell you presently," answered Captain George. "May I assume that you were acquainted with Mr. Edmund Fairfax?"

"You may assume what the deuce you like, sir," answered the peppery colonel. "It seems to me that there is a great deal too much assumption about you. But go on. What are you driving at next?"

"The Mr. Edmund Fairfax to whom I allude, was married at Whitehaven to a certain young lady, Miss Pollexfen by name. If I am rightly informed, you were a witness to that marriage. Mr. Fairfax and his wife went abroad. A year later, Mr. Fairfax was unfortunately drowned in one of the Swiss lakes. You were the bearer of the news of his death to his widow, who shortly after that event returned to England. I hope, sir, that you follow me thus far?"

"Oh, I follow you easily enough, never fear!" replied the irascible old soldier. "You tell your tale as glibly as if you had learnt it by

heart beforehand. But you have not done yet. When you have come to an end, I may, perhaps, question the truth of your statements in toto."

"From the date of her arrival in England up to the time of her death, which event happened a few weeks ago, Mrs. Fairfax lived in the utmost seclusion—in fact, she lived under an assumed name. But, sir, she had a daughter. That daughter is now grown up, and is acquainted with her mother's story. It is as her advocate that I am here to-day."

"A youthful Daniel come to judgment!" sneered the colonel. "Well, sir, granting for the sake of argument that there may be some slight residuum of truth in what you have just told me—what then? You have something still in the background."

"Simply this, Colonel Lant. Mrs. Fairfax never knew, nor beyond a few questions put to you on a certain occasion did she ever seek to know, anything concerning the antecedents and social position of her husband. When once her husband was lost to her, all minor considerations

were regarded with perfect indifference. But as respects Miss Fairfax, the case is very different. Those who have her interests most at heart—that is to say, my uncle, Major Strickland, and another old friend of Mrs. Fairfax, who is associated with him in this matter—are naturally anxious that Miss Fairfax should no longer be left in doubt as to her parentage and proper position in the world. I am their envoy to you. You alone can tell them where and how to look for that which they want to find."

"And so pretty Mrs. Fairfax is dead," said the colonel after a pause. "Ay! ay! each of us must go in turn. I had a narrow squeak myself a few days ago, I can tell you. Sweet Mrs. Fairfax! and dead, you say? Twenty years have gone by since I saw her last; but I have often thought about her, and always as being young and pretty. I never could think of her as touched by Time's finger: as having grey hair, and wrinkles, and all that, you know. For ever sweet and young. I was half in love

with her myself, and should have been wholly so had not Fairfax been beforehand with me. But she was far away too good for him, and for me too, for that matter. And now, dead!"

Colonel Lant had wandered so far back into the past that he was near forgetting the presence of Captain Strickland. The latter sat without speaking. The sick man's half-conscious revelations were sufficient to prove that he was on the right track. At length the colonel came back with a sigh and a start to the practical present.

"A daughter, did you not say—a grown-up daughter? Dear me! And in the interests of this daughter you want to know something about the antecedents and history of Ned Fairfax. Well! well! it was a bad piece of business, and some reparation is certainly due."

"I tell you, sir, that some reparation is certainly due," re-asserted the colonel, in his most peppery style. "And I'll e'en make a

clean breast of it while I've a chance of doing so—though, mind you, whether Ned Fairfax would approve of such a step on my part, is more than I can say. Probably he wouldn't. But that don't matter. If he knew I lay dying, he would not trouble himself to come twenty miles to see me. Then why should I study his interests so particularly? I may tell you, Captain What's-your-name, in confidence, mind, that when I lay here a few days ago, so ill that I was doubtful whether I should ever get round again, this very business of which we have been talking, and of which as yet you don't know all the particulars, stood out very black in my memory, and troubled my mind not a little. Now, I'm not going to die this time, but while I've the chance I'll rub out that little score, so that when my Black Monday really does come, it may not crop up against me for the second time, and stare me in the face with the ugly look of an unrepented wrong."

Captain George sat without speaking. It was

quite evident to him that Colonel Lant was one of those people who love to hear themselves talk, but who pay small regard to the wishes or opinions of others. Left to himself, the colonel would probably let fall more valuable information of his own accord than could be elicited from him by the keenest cross-examination.

"An ugly piece of business!" resumed the colonel. "Many a time since then have I felt sorry that I allowed myself to be talked into doing what I did by Ned Fairfax's plausible tongue. For one thing, I owed him money at that time, and he might have made it hot for me had I refused to comply with his wishes. The marriage itself was all right and proper, but the story of the drowning in one of the Swiss lakes was a pure forgery. You may well look surprised. Ned Fairfax was no more drowned than I was: in fact, to my certain knowledge he was alive only three months ago."

The colonel paused to refresh himself with a

pinch of snuff, and then went on again. "When Edmund Fairfax married Miss Pollexfen, the fact of such a ceremony having taken place was most jealously guarded from all his people. His expectations at that juncture might be said to depend upon his remaining a bachelor. But he saw Miss Pollexfen and fell in love with her, and he was not a man to let anything thwart him in the gratification of his likes or dislikes. He married Miss Pollexfen and risked the future. All went well with the young couple for a year or more. They lived a quiet, secluded life, and were tolerably happy: not that Fairfax was a man who would have been happy for any length of time in the quiet trammels of domestic life. But he had not had time to get thoroughly tired before the thunder-cloud burst. He was summoned back to England by his uncle, to marry the young lady, a great heiress, who had been set down for him in the family programme. The predicament was an awkward one, but Fairfax was equal to the occasion. At that time he was close upon five-and-twenty

years of age. He had spent one fortune already, and he was booked to come into another on his twenty-fifth birthday. He would come into another, that is, provided he were willing to change his name from Fairfax to that of the old lady, a distant relation, by whom the fortune was bequeathed. Fairfax had no foolish predilection for one name over another when there was money to be got by the change. His plan was to come to England, leaving his first wife abroad; to wait for the birthday which would at once give him a fortune and allow him to change his name; after that to marry the heiress with all convenient speed. The story of his death was cleverly concocted, and, with my assistance, as cleverly carried out. Mrs. Fairfax believed the story, and Ned knew her gentle nature too well to fear that she would ever make any inquiry as to his history or family, they being topics on which he had declined to enlighten her when he was supposed to be alive. The result of the plot as regards Mrs. Fairfax, you

probably know better than I do. She accepted her fate, and disappeared from her husband's path, which was precisely what he wanted. The result as regarded Fairfax himself was something different from his expectations. He changed his name, and he came into his fortune, but his bride that was to have been, died two months before the day fixed for the wedding. Fairfax bore his loss with great equanimity. He smoked more cigars than before, and bought a commission in a marching regiment. A few months later he was ordered out to India. Before leaving Europe he set on foot a private inquiry, having for its object the discovery of the whereabouts of Mrs. Fairfax. But the inquiry elicited nothing beyond its own heavy expenses, and it is possible that Fairfax was quite as well pleased that it did not.

"Well, sir, my friend Edmund proceeded to India, and there he remained for several years. He worked himself up to a captaincy, and he might have done exceedingly well had not the

cursed spirit of gambling eaten into his very soul. But he was and is a born gambler, and will be so till the end of the chapter. He would gamble for the nails in his own coffin if he had nothing else to play for. His second fortune went as his first had gone. Just as he was on the verge of ruin some unpleasantness in connexion with a gambling transaction induced him to sell out and return to England. Since that time how he has contrived to live and appear like a gentleman is a problem best known to himself. And now, sir, I think I have told you all that it concerns you to know respecting my friend Mr. Edmund Fairfax."

"All but one thing, Colonel Lant, and that a most essential one."

"What is it?"

"You state that Mr. Fairfax changed his name some time after his marriage with Miss Pollexfen. By what name is he now known?"

"He is known as Captain Edmund Ducie, and his London address when I last heard

from him was 2A, Tremaine-street, Piccadilly."

These particulars were duly taken down by Captain Strickland in his pocket-book. It must be borne in mind that the name of Ducie sounded quite strange in his ears. He had never heard mention of the Great Mogul Diamond.

"As I said before, I don't know whether my friend Fairfax, or rather Ducie, would altogether approve of my telling you so much of his history and private affairs," said the colonel; "but I don't care greatly whether he approves or does the other thing. I've eased my mind of a burden, the weight of which I have felt several times of late; and since there is a child, it is only right that she should know her father."

After some further conversation, in the course of which he elicited from the old soldier sundry minor particulars having reference to his errand, Captain Strickland took his leave and returned to town.

The day was still early, and George drove

direct from the terminus to 2A, Tremaine-street, Piccadilly. But Captain Ducie had removed from Tremaine-street nearly two years ago, and George was directed to a much humbler locality but no great distance away. Here the rooms were still held in Captain Ducie's name, so George was told, but the captain himself had not been seen there for nearly six months. The gentleman had better go down to the Piebalds, which used to be Captain Ducie's club, and there he might perhaps learn where the latter was now living. So spake the janitress, and to the Piebalds Captain Strickland repaired.

Here he got what he wanted when the porter had "taken stock" of him, and had satisfied himself that he could not possibly be a dun. Captain Ducie's present address, he was told, was the Royal George Hotel, St. Helier, Jersey.

That night's post took a long letter addressed to Major Strickland. George waited in London for an answer to it. One came sooner than he

expected. It was in the shape of a telegram :—

"Start for Jersey at once. I will write to you there by next post."

CHAPTER III.

AT THE "ROYAL GEORGE."

On the sixth day after the arrival of Captain Ducie at St. Helier, the Weymouth boat brought over two passengers who had attracted more attention from their fellow-travellers than any other two people on board.

The elder of the two was a white-haired venerable-looking gentleman who wore gold-rimmed spectacles and was richly dressed in furs. A cap made out of the skin of some wild animal, with the tail hanging down behind, fitted his head like a helmet, and gave him quite an un-English appearance.

His companion was a very beautiful young woman of three or four-and-twenty, richly, but quietly attired: evidently his daughter.

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When, on the arrival of the boat, the luggage was fished out of the hold, several adventurous spirits pressed forward to read the label on the young lady's boxes. This was what rewarded their curiosity:—

MISS VAN LOAL,

PASSENGER TO JERSEY.

"Drive to the 'Royal George,'" said the old gentleman as he and his daughter stepped into a fly on the pier, and several of the curious who had taken him for a foreigner were surprised to find that he spoke English like one to the manner born. But had any inhabitant of Tydsbury chanced to be on the pier that evening, he would have recognised in the foreign-looking gentleman and his superb daughter, two townsfolk of his own,—to wit, Mr. Solomon Madgin and his daughter Mirpah. With what object they had come so far from home, and under an assumed name, we shall presently learn.

Captain Ducie, cigar in mouth, was lounging

at the door of the "Royal George" when the fly drove up in which Mr. and Miss Van Loal were seated. Mirpah's beauty took his eye. He removed his cigar, stepped back a pace or two, and gazed. Mirpah's eyes met his. She had a presentiment that she saw before her the Captain Ducie of whom she had read so much in her brother's Reports from Bon Repos, and in whose possession the Great Mogul Diamond was said to be. Mirpah's eyes fell, a faint tinge of colour came into her cheek, and she and her father passed forward into the hotel.

"By Jove!" was Captain Ducie's sole comment aloud. Then he pulled his hat farther over his brows, resumed his cigar, and lounged off towards the pier.

This scene had been witnessed by a pale-faced, spectacled young man from a window of Button's Hotel on the other side of the way. As soon as Ducie had disappeared round the corner, this young man left his place of espionage, came out into the street, and crossed over

to the "Royal George." Here he asked for and was conducted to the sitting-room of Mr. Van Loal, but he sent the waiter back and opened the door of the room himself.

"My dear James!" "My dear brother!" were the exclamations that greeted his entrance.

"Hush! not quite so loud, if you please," said cautious James with a warning finger in the air. Then, having carefully closed the door, he shook his father warmly by the hand, and turned to embrace his sister. Whereupon a long conversation ensued among the three which need not be detailed here.

Instead of dining in his own room as he had hitherto done, Captain Ducie made his appearance at the table d'hôte this evening. He went down early, and there, just as if it had been pre-arranged that they should meet, he found Mr. Van Loal and his daughter.

The evenings were growing rather chilly, and a small fire had been lighted. Mr. Van Loal, now stripped of his furs and appearing in ordinary evening dress, with the most expansive of

shirt-fronts and the stiffest of white neckcloths, had got as near the fire as he well could, and was warming his thin white hands over the flickering blaze.

Mirpah, with one elbow resting on the chimney-piece, was standing near him, looking, Ducie thought, even more beautiful in her black filmy evening dress than she had looked in her travelling costume. One thing Ducie could not help noticing—that on the hands both of father and daughter there glittered several very magnificent rings. Other jewellery they wore none.

As Captain Ducie advanced up the room, Miss Van Loal crossed over to the other side to look at some stuffed birds. Accidentally or purposely she dropped her handkerchief. It had scarcely touched the ground before Captain Ducie had recovered it. With a smile and a bow he gave it back to its owner.

The ice had been broken, and presently Mr. Van Loal and the captain were conversing easily and confidentially about the island, its

scenery, its history, and its climate. Mirpah glided back to her father's side. She did not join in the conversation, but once or twice Ducie caught her eyes fixed on his face with an expression in them that was flattering to his vanity.

When dinner was announced he did not fail to secure for himself the chair next to that of Mirpah. There was something about this dark-eyed beauty that took his fancy amazingly. His powers of fascination were in danger of growing rusty from disuse. He was glad that an opportunity had arisen which would allow him to prove, were it only for his own satisfaction, that his old prowess with the sex had not quite deserted him.

Here was no fashionable young lady, the butterfly of a hundred drawing-rooms, to subdue; but something far more unconventional: a woman altogether unused to so-called fashionable life, as his critical glance had told him in a moment; but still an undoubted lady, and the possessor of a pair of the most unfathomable

eyes that his own had ever gazed into. Therefore he sat down to the siege he had proposed to himself with an alacrity that was infinitely refreshing to him after his long severance from the delights of female society.

Later on, Captain Ducie proposed a stroll along the pier. Mr. Van Loal and his daughter at once assented.

The night was warm and a full moon was sailing through the sky. Faint strains of music came wafted from afar, and mingled with the plash of the incoming tide. Could anyone have questioned Captain Ducie on the point, he would have declared that his "spooning" days had come to an end twenty years before, and he would have believed his own statement. Men in love he was in the habit of regarding with good-natured cynicism as though they were in a state of temporary insanity superinduced by their own folly, and were not to be held accountable like ordinary mortals. But to-night, what with the moonlight, the music, the rhythmic beat of the

waves on the sands, and the propinquity of Mirpah Van Loal, Captain Ducie felt the first delicious symptoms of a fever to which his blood had been a stranger for years.

After he had parted for the night from Van Loal and his charming daughter, and was in the solitude of his own bedroom, he laughed aloud to think how very like a greenhorn who had fallen in love for the first time he had felt that evening. He recognised the feeling, and was contemptuous of himself even while revelling in the unaccustomed sweetness. It was a sweetness that waited on his dreams all the night long, and when he opened his eyes next morning he felt as though Time's finger had moved back the figures on the dial of his life, and that he was not only a boy in years again, but also—and that would have been the greater miracle of the two—once more a boy at heart.

But he was a middle-aged cynic again the moment he put his foot out of bed. There is no

disenchanter like the clear cold light of morning. It was not that he deemed Mirpah one whit less beautiful than she had seemed in his eyes the previous night. He was savage with himself for allowing any woman, however fascinating she might be, to touch his cold heart with the flame of a torch that for him had long been quenched in the waters of Lethe.

Nevertheless, by the time he had discussed his breakfast, he was by no means sorry to remember that he had an engagement at eleven o'clock to drive Mr. Van Loal and his daughter to Grève-de-Lecq. It would really be a pleasant mode of spending the lazy autumn day, and he would take very good care that Mademoiselle Van Loal's witching eyes did not cast a spell round him for the second time.

Forewarned is forearmed, and, after all his experience of the sex, it would be a pitiful tale indeed if he allowed himself to be entangled

by any young lady, however charming she might be, of whom, as in the present case, he knew next to nothing.

Having made this declaration to himself, he looked at his watch to see how near the time was to eleven.

"Curious name, Van Loal," he muttered. "Is it Dutch? or Belgian? or what is it? It smacks of the Low Countries. The man who bears such a name ought never to drink anything weaker than Schiedam. In the present case, however, both the old boy and his daughter must be English, whatever their ancestors may have been: they speak without the slightest foreign accent. Mademoiselle talks about the old fellow having just retired from business. What business was he, I wonder? There is something cosmopolitan about him that makes it difficult to guess in what particular line he has made his money. A few indirect questions may perhaps elicit the required information: not that it matters to me in anyway—not in the least."

The day was a pleasant one. Captain Ducie drove Mr. Van Loal and his daughter to some of the prettiest spots in the island. They had an al fresco luncheon in a sheltered corner of a lovely bay. After the meal was over, Mr. Van Loal wandered away to botanize by himself. Captain Ducie and Mirpah were left to entertain each other.

Said the latter: "It is quite amusing to see papa so enthusiastic after rare ferns and mosses. It is a pursuit so totally opposed to the previous occupations of his life that on this lovely island, and amid such quiet scenes, I can almost imagine that he would gradually grow young again, as people in fairy tales are sometimes said to do, and that in this botanising freak we have the first indication of the change."

"We cannot quite afford to have him changed into a young prince," said Ducie, "or else what would become of you? You would have to diminish into babyhood, and however pleasant a state that may be, I for one cannot wish you otherwise than as you are."

"You must have graduated with honours in the art of paying compliments, Captain Ducie. Long study and the practice of many years have been needed to make you such an adept. I congratulate you on the result."

Captain Ducie laughed. "A very fair hit," he said, "but in the present case totally undeserved. Had I been a young fellow of eighteen I should have blushed and fidgetted, and have thought you excessively cruel. But being an old fellow of forty or more, I can enjoy your retort while being myself the butt at which your shaft is aimed. It speaks well for the purity of Mr. Van Loal's conscience that in the intervals of a busy life, and one which has doubtless its own peculiar cares and anxieties, he can yet enjoy so refined an amusement as that of fern hunting."

"That remark ought to elicit some information from her as to the old boy's métier," added Ducie under his breath. "Is he a retired grocer? or a sleeping partner in some old-established bank?"

"Papa's life has indeed been a busy one," answered Mirpah, "but for the future, I hope that he will have ample opportunity to indulge in whatever mode of passing his time may suit his fancy best. With the real business of life, that is, with the money-making part of it, I trust that he has done for ever. What his occupation was you would never guess, Captain Ducie. Come, now, I will wager you half-a-dozen pairs of gloves that out of the same number of guesses you do not succeed in naming papa's business—and it was a business, and in no way connected with any of the learned professions."

"Done!" exclaimed Ducie eagerly, holding out his hand to clench the bet. The tips of Miss Van Loal's fingers rested for an instant in his palm, and Ducie felt that he could well afford to lose.

He was silent for a minute or two, pretending to think. In the end, his six guesses stood as follows: He guessed that Mr. Van Loal had been either a banker, or a stock-broker, or a

brewer, or a drysalter, or an architect, or some sort of a contractor.

"Lost!" cried Mirpah in high glee, when the sixth guess was proclaimed. "Papa was none of the things you have named. You have not gone far enough a-field in your guesses: you have not sufficiently exercised your inventive faculties. No, Captain Ducie, my father was neither a banker, nor anything else that you have specified. *He was a Diamond Merchant.*"

Mirpah allowed these last words to slide from between her lips as quietly as though she were making the most commonplace statement in the world; but their effect upon Captain Ducie was apparently to paralyse his faculties for a few moments. All the colour left his face; his eyes, full of trouble and suspicion, sought those of Mirpah, anxious to read there whether or no she had any knowledge of his great secret—whether the stab she had given him was an intentional or an accidental one. Involuntarily his hand sought the folds of his

waistcoat. He breathed again. His treasure was still there. In the dark luminous eyes of the beautiful girl before him he read no hint of any crafty secret, of any sinister design. It was nothing more, then, than a strange coincidence. He had been fooled by his own fears. Had this Van Loal and his daughter by some mysterious means become acquainted with his secret, and had they come to Jersey with any ulterior designs against himself, the fact that Van Loal had been a diamond merchant would have been something to conceal as undoubtedly provocative of suspicion. The very fact of such a statement having been made was his surest guarantee that he had nothing sinister to guard against. He had frightened himself with a shadow. The magnificent diamond rings worn by the old man and his daughter were at once accounted for.

"I am afraid that you regret having made such a reckless wager," said Mirpah, with an arch look at the captain. "But, indeed, you ought to pay your forfeit, were it only for having

guessed that poor papa had been a drysalter—whatever that may be. I suppose it has something to do with the curing of herrings or hams. A drysalter!" and Mirpah's clear laugh rang out across the sands.

"I own the wager fairly lost," said Ducie, as he prepared to light a cigar, "and will cheerfully pay the forfeit. Had I guessed for a week it would still have been lost. I hardly knew that there were such people as professional diamond merchants in this country."

"They form a small corporation, it is true, but by no means an unimportant one in their own estimation. The professed jewellers, the men who keep the magnificent shops, would be but poorly off without the diamond-dealers to fall back upon. We—the Van Loals—have been members of the guild for three centuries—not in England, but in Amsterdam, where our name is a name of honour. Papa was born there, but he came to England when he was a young man and married an English girl, and

from that time he has lived in the country of his adoption. He has promised that next spring we shall visit Amsterdam together: then, for the first time, I shall see the land where my ancestors lived and died."

Mr. Van Loal came up at this juncture, and the semi-confidential talk between Mirpah and Captain Ducie came to an end.

At the table d'hôte that evening Ducie sat between father and daughter. He exerted himself to the utmost to make an agreeable impression on both of them. After dinner the two men had a smoke and a stroll on the pier. They were both men of the world, and had a score of topics in common on which they could talk fluently and well. Ducie's easy languid far niente style of looking at everything that did not impinge on his own personality formed a piquant contrast to the shrewd calculating matter-of-fact way of looking at the same subjects which distinguished the soi-disant Van Loal. They kept each other company till a late hour.

When Ducie got to his own room he bolted the door and lighted a last cigar. He wanted to meditate quietly for half an hour. No man could be more clear-sighted than he was as regarded his own faults and follies in all cases where his conscience was not brought into question. To-night, he at once acknowledged to himself that he was more deeply in love with Mirpah Van Loal than he had thought ever to be with any woman again. He had sneered at himself, before setting out in the morning, for his infatuation of the previous night, but now the second night had come, and he was twice as much infatuated as before. He did not sneer at himself to-night, but he set himself critically to consider why he had fallen in love, and whither this new disturbing influence in his life was likely to lead him.

But the why and the wherefore of the cases that have to be adjudicated before the tribunal of Love can seldom be argued coolly by either of the parties chiefly concerned. Their statements are sure to be ex-parte ones, their

arguments to be coloured by personal feeling, while the philtre that is working in their blood obscures their logic and clouds their brains. In stating the case before himself, the first question Ducie asked was: "What is the particular charm about Miss Van Loal that has induced me to make such a fool of myself at my time of life?"

"Well," he answered himself, leisurely puffing, with hands buried deep in pockets—"that there is a peculiar charm about Miss Van Loal is a fact which I, for one, cannot dispute. She does not belong to the monde, and never will belong to it, for which I like her none the worse. She is fresh and unconventional, and much better educated than most ladies of fashion. There is no mawkish sentimentality about her. She is not a boarding-school miss, but a woman, intelligent and full of clear, calm, good sense. Good-tempered too, unless I am greatly mistaken, and that goes for much with a man of my years. Lastly, she is very nice-looking; beau-

tiful would not be too strong a word to apply in her case, and her beauty is of a kind one does not see every day. She is in good style, too, and with a little training would hold her own anywhere.

"As to whither this new passion is leading me?—If at the end of another week I like Miss Van Loal as well as I like her now, I shall make her an offer of marriage. It is by no means certain that she will accept me, but should she do so I suppose my people will say that I have made a low marriage, and will cut me accordingly. Well, I should rather enjoy being cut under such circumstances. There's not one of the whole tribe that would give me another sovereign to save me from starving. Thanks to one little fact, I shall never again have occasion to ask them for a sovereign. Why, then, should I not marry Miss Van Loal? I have an idea that I could be happier with her as my wife than I have ever been before. I should no longer feel the sting of poverty. I could afford to live a life of thorough

respectability, and I would never look on a card again. There are some lovely nooks on the continent, and—but, bah! why pursue the dream any farther? That it will prove to be anything more than a dream I dare scarcely hope."

He rose and flung away the end of his cigar, and began to prepare for bed. "By what singular fatality does it happen that Mr. Van Loal, a dealer in diamonds, has been brought en rapport with me who hold in my possession one of the finest diamonds in the world? In any case, I have made his acquaintance most opportunely. Through his assistance I may be enabled to find a purchaser for my gem."

CHAPTER IV.

A LITTLE DINNER FOR THREE.

Two or three days passed quietly away without any particular incident that need be recorded here. Captain Ducie was much with the Van Loals. Each day they went on an excursion together, and on these occasions the Captain always acted the part of charioteer. As they were driving back into St. Helier one afternoon, said Ducie: "I have ventured to order a dinner for three in my rooms for this evening. May I hope that you and Miss Van Loal will honour me with your company?"

"We will accept your invitation with pleasure," said the old man, "on condition that you dine with us to-morrow in return."

"A condition that I shall be happy to comply with," answered Ducie. "I have something of a very rare and curious nature to show you after dinner: something respecting which I wish you to favour me with your opinion."

"You may command my humble services in any way," answered Van Loal.

At seven to the minute Mr. Van Loal, his daughter, and Captain Ducie, sat down to a well served dinner in the sitting-room of the latter. Mirpah looked very lovely, but paler than ordinary. She seemed anxious and distraite, Ducie thought, and was more than usually silent during the progress of the meal. In the delicate curves of her mouth Ducie fancied that he detected a lurking sadness. He felt that he would have given much to fathom the cause of her unwonted melancholy. What if this incipient sadness were merely a symptom of dawning love? What if she were learning to regard him with some small portion of the same feeling that he had for her? Hope whispered faintly in his ear that such might possibly be the case, but he was not essentially

a vain man, and with an impatient shrug he dismissed the seductive whisper, and turned his attention to other things. On one point his mind was quite made up. The very next opportunity that he should have of being alone with Mr. Van Loal he would ask that gentleman's permission to put a certain question to his daughter, and if anything might be augured from a man's manner, his request would meet with no unkind reception. The opportunity he sought would hardly be afforded him this evening. Captain Ducie's sitting-room would, on this occasion, have to fill the offices both of dining and drawing-room. There would be no occasion for Miss Van Loal to retire after the cloth should be drawn. The gentlemen might smoke their cigars on the balcony. What Captain Ducie had to say in private to Mr. Van Loal would very well keep till morning. He had something particular to say to Mr. Van Loal this evening, but it was something that did not preclude the presence of Mirpah. When the time drew near that he had fixed on in his own mind as the

proper time for introducing this one special topic —about half an hour after the withdrawal of the cloth—he hardly knew in what terms to begin. He could think of no periphrastical opening by means of which he could introduce the all-important topic. In sheer despair of any readier mode he at length plunged boldly into the breach.

"I have been informed, Mr. Van Loal, that you are a diamond merchant," he said, "and that you have a wide knowledge of gems of various kinds, and can consequently form a trustworthy opinion as to the value of any that may be submitted for your inspection."

"Well—yes—" said Van Loal with a slow dubious smile, "I am, or rather was, a dealer in diamonds, howsoever you may have ascertained that fact."

"It was I who told Captain Ducie, papa," said Mirpah in her quiet clear tones.

"Quite right, my love. I am not ashamed of my profession," answered the old man. Then turning to Ducie, he said: "Any information

that I may be in possession of on the various subjects embraced by my experience I shall be most happy to afford you."

"My object in introducing the topic is to ask you to do me the favour to appraise a certain Diamond which I have in my possession: to let me have your opinion as to its qualities, good or bad, together with an estimate of its probable value."

Mr. Van Loal whistled under his breath. "Diamonds are very difficult things to appraise with any degree of correctness, especially where there is any particular feature about them, either in size, colour, water, or cutting, that separates them from the ordinary category of such things. Is the Diamond to which you refer an ordinary one? or has it any special features of its own?"

"It has several special features, such as its size, its colour, and its extraordinary brilliance. But I will fetch it, and you shall examine it for yourself. Pardon my leaving you for one moment."

With a smile and a bow Captain Ducie rose from his chair, crossed the floor, and disappeared within an inner room. Mr. Van Loal and his daughter exchanged glances full of meaning. The pallor deepened on Mirpah's cheek: she toyed nervously with her fan; and even the old man, ordinarily so calm and self-contained, looked anxious and brimful of nervous excitement. His fingers wandered frequently to his waistcoat, in one pocket of which there seemed to be some object of whose presence there he needed frequently to assure himself.

Ducie returned after an absence of two minutes. He too seemed to have caught that contagion of nervous excitement which marked the demeanour of his two guests. Was he warned by some subtle instinct that one of the great crises of his life was at hand? Or was he merely a prey to that vulgar fear which all who practice the art of illegal conveyancing must or ought to feel when the proceeds of their nefarious deeds are submitted for the first time to the common light of day?

"This is the gem which I am desirous of submitting for your inspection."

He held out his right hand, and there on his open palm the Great Mogul Diamond sparkled and glowed, a chrysolite of pure green fire. An exclamation of surprise and delight burst simultaneously from the lips of Mirpah and her father.

"In the whole course of my experience I have never seen anything to equal this," said Van Loal, as he donned his spectacles. "May I take it into my own fingers to examine?"

"Certainly; I have brought it in order that you may do so."

Speaking thus, Captain Ducie dropped the Diamond into the extended palm of the supposed dealer. Some inward qualm next moment made him half put out his hand as if he would have reclaimed the Diamond there and then. But the lean fingers of Van Loal had already closed over the gem, and Ducie's arm dropped aimlessly by his side.

Mr. Van Loal rose from his seat and went close up to the lamp that he might examine the

stone more minutely. There he was joined by Mirpah, whose curiosity quite equalled that of her father. They both stood gazing at it for full two minutes without speaking.

"Wonderful! Magnificent!" exclaimed Mr. Van Loal at length. "Words fail me to express the admiration I feel at sight of so rare a gem. Can it be possible, Captain Ducie, that you are the fortunate possessor of such a treasure? I should think myself one of the most favoured of mortals did such a Diamond belong to me."

"It is mine," answered Ducie, calmly and deliberately. "It has been in the possession of our family for two centuries. Originally it came from the Indies, and is said to have been worn by the great Aurungzebe himself."

"If the Great Mogul never did wear it, he ought to have done so. Even among his remarkable treasures he can have possessed but few stones equal to this one. You can never be called a poor man, Captain Ducie, while you retain this in your possession. Mirpah, my child, what say you?"

"What can I say, papa? I am not enthusiastic, as you know, nor given to indulge in notes of admiration. I can only say that in my poor experience I have never seen anything to equal it. Diamonds as large, or larger, I have seen several times, but they were all white, or of inferior water. I have never seen a green one at all comparable to this one either for size or brilliancy, and I think, papa, that even your wider experience will, in this respect, tally with mine."

"Completely so," answered the old man. "I question whether, among all the crown jewels of Europe, there is a green diamond that can in any way match it, either for colour or brilliancy. Captain Ducie, your treasure is almost unique."

"Can you furnish me with anything like an estimate of its probable value?"

"I am doubtful whether I can. Were it an ordinary white diamond the value could be easily calculated when once the weight was known. But with a green diamond the case is very different. In addition to what its value would be

as an ordinary diamond, it would command an extra or fancy price in the market, from the rarity of its colour in conjunction with its size. This additional value is a most difficult thing to gauge accurately. Even among professional dealers you would hardly find two who would name the same figure, or the same figure within a very wide margin, if called upon to estimate the worth of your green diamond."

"Still," said Ducie, "I should like you to furnish me with some approximate estimate of its probable value."

"What is its weight?"

"Nearly eighty-five carats."

"In that case you may estimate its value somewhere between one hundred and forty and two hundred thousand pounds."

The Diamond had been passed on by Mr. Van Loal to his daughter for examination.

"A gem fit for an empress to wear!" was Mirpah's remark as she handed the stone back to her father.

"Observe the mode in which this Diamond is

cut," said Van Loal. "It has been done in the Indies after a style which has been handed down from father to son for a thousand years. You should let it be operated upon by our Amsterdam cutters. They would turn it out at the end of six months, less in size it is true, but so greatly improved in every other respect, that you would hardly know it for the same gem. May I ask whether it is your intention to dispose of it by private treaty?"

"It is my intention ultimately so to do," answered Ducie.

"I suppose you have no objection to my trying the temper of your Diamond on the window?"

"None whatever," said Ducie, with a shrug. "You may write your name on every pane in the hotel if you please."

"That would indeed be a painful exhibition of vanity," replied Van Loal, with a weak attempt at a pun.

Speaking thus, he rose from his seat, and crossed the floor, holding the Diamond between the thumb and finger of his right hand.

Curtains of crimson damask draped the windows. One of these curtains Van Loal drew noisily aside. A second or two later those in the room could hear the slow scratching of the Diamond on the glass.

Mirpah's cheek grew still paler as the sound met her ears.

Just then Ducie was thinking as much of the beautiful girl before him as of the Diamond.

"I hope you have not forgotten our engagement to visit Elizabeth Castle to-morrow," he said. "It will be low water at noon, and we can either walk across the sands to it or ride, as may seem best to you"

"I have not forgotten," said Mirpah, softly, and from her eyes there shot a swift, half-sorrowful glance that thrilled him to the heart.

"I must make my opportunity to-morrow and propose to her," he said to himself. "I never thought to love again, but I love Mirpah Van Loal, and will make her my wife if she will let me do so. Perhaps the future may have a quiet happiness in store for me, such as I never dreamed

of in all the wild days that have come and gone since my father turned me out of doors, and I first thought myself a man. I begin to think there is something in life that I have altogether missed."

This thought was working in his mind when Mr. Van Loal came back from the window still holding the Diamond between the thumb and finger of his right hand. He deposited it lightly in Ducie's palm.

"A wonderful gem, my dear sir—a truly wonderful gem!" said the old man. "I envy you the possession of such a treasure. In all my experience I have never seen or heard of its equal. But you must allow me to say that I think it very unwise on your part to carry so valuable an item of property about with you on your travels. Let me recommend you to deposit it with your banker, or in some other safe custody, as soon as ever you get back to England; unless, indeed, you may wish to dispose of it, in which case allow me to offer my humble services as negotiator of the transaction for you."

"No one on the island, save yourself and Miss Van Loal, is aware that I carry such an article about with me; consequently there is no fear of its being stolen. As it happens, I *am* desirous of disposing of the Diamond—in fact, I should have sold it some time ago had I known how to conduct such a transaction without running the risk of being egregiously duped. Your kind offer of your valuable services has disposed of that difficulty, and, with your permission, we will discuss the matter in extenso to-morrow."

He had risen while speaking, and he now went away into the inner room, carrying the Diamond with him. As soon as his back was turned a quick meaning glance passed between father and daughter. There was a look of triumph in the eyes of Van Loal which told Mirpah that the object which had brought them all the way from their Midlandshire home had been successfully achieved.

No word passed between the two, and Ducie came back in less than a minute. Conversation was resumed, and still the theme was diamonds

and rare gems. As was only to be expected from one who called himself a dealer in such merchandise, Mr. Van Loal showed himself to be deeply versed in all matters relating to precious stones. Captain Ducie was greatly interested. The little company did not break up till a late hour.

"At noon to-morrow. You will not forget?" said Ducie, as he held Mirpah's hand for a moment at the door of his room. She made him no answer in words, but again that strange half-sorrowful look shot from her eyes to his, and her soft hand clasped his in a way that it had never been betrayed into doing before. Then they parted. Captain Ducie's dreams that night were happy dreams.

Mirpah Van Loal must either have forgotten her overnight promise to Captain Ducie, or have held it in small regard, seeing that she left St. Helier by the Southampton boat at six forty-five next morning. She was accompanied by her father, and by a clean-shaven young gentleman, dressed in black, who had been living a

very secluded life for some time past at Button's Hotel.

As the boat steamed slowly out of the harbour, Mirpah threw a last searching glance among the crowd with which the pier was lined. "Poor Captain Ducie!" she murmured half aloud. Her father who happened to be standing close by, peered up curiously into her face and saw that her eyes were wet. He did not speak, but moved further away, and left her to her own thoughts.

They had an excellent passage, and Mirpah bore up bravely. Some time after leaving Guernsey, an English steamer bound for the Islands passed them a few hundred yards to leeward. The clean-shaven young gentleman in black was watching the stranger keenly through his glass when an expression of surprise burst from his lips. "What is it, James? What is it that you see, my boy?" asked Mr. Van Loal.

"On yonder boat I see an old acquaintance of yours and mine."

The old man took the glass and scanned the

passing ship, the passengers of which were scanning the Southampton boat eagerly in return, and had their faces turned full towards it. The old man laid down the glass after a minute's silent observation.

"James," he said in a solemn tone, "unless my eyes deceive me greatly, the mulatto, Cleon, is on board yonder ship."

"You are right, father. Cleon *is* on board that ship. He was not killed, then, after all, in his encounter with Captain Ducie."

"Such a fellow as that takes a deal of killing. On one point we may be pretty sure: that by some means or other he has discovered Captain Ducie's whereabouts and is now on his track."

"Wants his revenge, perhaps."

"Wants to recover the Great Mogul Diamond, mayhap."

Madgin Junior laughed. "He will hardly succeed in doing that, father. Mr. Van Loal has been in the field before him."

CHAPTER V.

CLEON REDIVIVUS.

When Madgin Junior averred that he saw Cleon, the mulatto servant of the late M. Platzoff, on board the steamer which would be due in Guernsey some two hours later, he stated no more than the truth. That dusky individual was there, looking as well as ever he had looked in his life; sprucely, even elegantly dressed; and having a watchful eye on his two small articles of luggage: a miniature portmanteau, and a tiny black leather bag. At Guernsey he quitted the steamer, and waiting on the pier till he saw it fairly under way again for the sister island, he entered at once into negotiations with some of the hardy boatmen generally to be found lounging about St. Peter's port. The result was that

a pretty little skiff was brought round, into which Mr. Cleon and his luggage were carefully stowed, the whole being taken charge of by a couple of sailors who at once hoisted their sail and stood out in a straight line for Jersey. The wind was in their favour, but the tide was against them nearly the whole way, and it was quite dark before they got under the lee of the lighthouse and found themselves safely sheltered in the little harbour of St. Helier. It is quite possible that Mr. Cleon may have had some motive in not wishing to land by daylight, at all events he seemed in nowise dissatisfied by his late arrival, but paid his boatmen liberally and dismissed them.

Skirting the head of the harbour cautiously, with his coat collar turned up and his hat well slouched over his eyes, Cleon entered the first low public-house to which he came and called for a glass of rum. A number of men, sailors chiefly, and loafers of various kinds, passed in and out while he stood at the bar, at each one of whom he glanced keenly. He waited nearly half an

hour before he found the sort of face he wanted —one in which low cunning and intelligence were combined. He took the owner of this face aside and held a private parley with him for full ten minutes. Then the man went away and Mr. Cleon ordered a private room and some tea.

He was still discussing his chop when the man got back.

"Well—what news? Make your report," said the mulatto.

"All right, captain," with a touch of his forelock. "Found out all you wanted to know, right slick away. Make you no error on that point. I promised to do it, and I done it. Oh, yes. There's no flies about what I'm going to tell you. Captain Ducie is stopping at the 'Royal George,' and has been stopping there for the last ten days. Up to last night most of his time was spent with an old gentleman and a young lady, father and daughter, of the name of Van Loal. But they went away by this morning's boat, and Captain Ducie has been mooning about all day,

seeming as if he hardly knew what to do with himself. Just now he is up the town at one of the billiard saloons, and is not expected home before eleven."

"You know all the billiard rooms in the town. Go and find out at which one of them Captain Ducie is engaged, and whether he is so fixed that he is likely to remain there for some time to come."

In less than a quarter of an hour the man was back. "The Captain is playing pool with a lot more swells at Baxter's rooms, and seems well fixed for another hour to come."

The mulatto had already paid his bill, and was ready for a start. "Now show me the 'Royal George' Hotel," said he.

The hotel was pointed out and the man paid and dismissed. Cleon entered the hotel with the air of a proprietor, and asked to be shown a private sitting room. He was shown into one on the first floor. It was small but comfortable. He expressed himself as being perfectly satisfied with it, and then he ordered dinner.

While the meal was being got ready, Mr. Cleon stated that he should like to see such bedrooms as were disengaged. He was rather fastidious, he added, in the choice of a bedroom, and should prefer making his own selection. He was very pleasant and jocular with the chambermaid who showed him round.

In all there were five bedrooms in want of occupants, and Mr. Cleon was not satisfied till he had looked into each of them. "Come, now," he said, after peeping into the fifth and last, "if I am rightly informed, you have a military gentleman stopping in the house, a Captain ——."

"Ducie," added the girl as the mulatto stopped as if in doubt.

"Ah, that is the name. Captain Ducie. Now, soldiers generally know how to pick out the best quarters, and if I were to choose a bedroom on the same floor as the captain's I could hardly go far astray. Now, I dare say you could tell me the number of Captain Ducie's room?"

"The captain's room is number fourteen. Number ten, the next room but three to

it, is empty, and you can have it if you choose."

"I engage number ten on the spot," said Mr. Cleon, emphatically. "See that the sheets are properly aired, and here are a couple of half-crowns for your trouble."

Mr. Cleon ate his dinner in solitary state, and retired to his bedroom at an early hour. To his bedroom, but not to bed. After about five minutes his candle was put out. A minute or two later the door of his room was noiselessly opened, and showed him standing on the threshold, tall and black, like a spirit of evil in the dim starlight. After listening intently for a little while, he stole gently along the corridor from his own room to the door of number fourteen. This door he tried, and found that it yielded at once to his hand. He opened it a little way and peeped in. The room was dark and empty. Still listening, with every sense on the alert, he struck a noiseless match. The tiny flame, bright and clear, and lasting for about half a minute, was sufficient to enable him to photograph on his

memory the position of every article of furniture in the room. It was also sufficient to enable him to note something of much greater importance: that there was not only a stout lock on the door of number fourteen, but that the door could be still further secured on the inside by means of a strong bolt. He smothered the malediction that rose to his lips when he saw this, and then he stole back to his own room with the look of a baffled wild beast on his face.

Even now he did not go to bed, but sat waiting in the dark, with his door slightly ajar, for the coming of the tenant of number fourteen. Upwards of an hour passed away before he heard Captain Ducie's step on the stair. He seemed to draw back within himself as he heard it: to crouch as if getting ready for a spring. But the moment Captain Ducie entered number fourteen, Cleon was at the door of his own room and listening. He fell back a pace or two and shook his fist savagely in the air as he heard what he had felt almost sure he should hear. He heard Captain Ducie double lock the door of number

fourteen, and then shoot home the brass bolt, as though still further to secure himself against intruders. The mulatto's sharp white teeth clashed together viciously as the sound met his ear.

"Only wait!" he whispered down the dark corridor. Then he went in, and shut and locked the door of his own room.

Next morning he ordered breakfast to be taken up to bed to him. He was very unwell, he said, and should not be able to leave his room all that day. But his illness, whatever it might be, did not seem to affect his appetite. Luncheon, and afterwards dinner, were sent up to him in due course. At nine o'clock he rang his bell and ordered a bottle of claret. At the same time he instructed the waiter that he should not want anything more till morning; and that he must on no account be disturbed till that time.

He had been singularly uneasy and watchful all day, listening frequently, with his door slightly ajar, to the downstairs noises of the hotel, sometimes even venturing a few yards down the cor-

ridor when the house was more than usually quiet, but retreating quickly to his den at the slightest sound of an approaching footstep. Once he had even penetrated into Captain Ducie's room for a few seconds. "Ah, scélérat! I shall have you yet," he muttered, as he shut himself out of the room after his brief survey.

Now that daylight had faded into dusk, and dusk had deepened into night, his proceedings were still more singular. After finishing his bottle of wine, he proceeded to take off his ordinary outer clothing, and in place of it to induct himself into a tight-fitting suit of some strong dark woven stuff that fitted him like a glove. Round his waist he buckled a belt of dull black leather, and into this belt he stuck a small sheathed dagger. Pendent from the belt was a tiny pouch made of the same material, into which he put some half dozen allumettes, and two small cones of some red material, each of them about four inches in height. This done, his toilette was finished. After a last glance round, he put

out the candles, opened the door, and halted on the threshold for a moment or two to listen.

The night was clear and unclouded, and through the staircase window the stars shone brightly in. The corridor was filled with their ghostly light. Midway in it stood the mulatto, black from head to foot, except for his two ferocious eyes that gleamed redly from under his heavy brows like danger signals pointing out the road to death. A pause of a few seconds and then he shut and locked the door of his room—locked it from the outside and put away the key in the tiny pouch by his side.

The quiet starlight seemed to fall away from him affrighted as he moved down the dusky corridor. Now that the door was shut behind him he went on without hesitation or pause. He had only a few paces to go. On reaching the door of number fourteen, he turned the handle, went in, and closed the door softly behind him.

CHAPTER VI.

PASTILLE-BURNING.

Rarely had Captain Ducie felt in a pleasanter frame of mind than when he went down to breakfast in the course of the forenoon following the evening on which he had shown Mr. Van Loal and his daughter the Great Mogul Diamond. Several circumstances had combined to render him more than ordinarily cheerful. He had fully made up his mind to propose to Mirpah Van Loal that very day, and he felt little fear that his suit would be rejected. Once married, he would cut his old associations for ever, would probably leave England for several years, and in some remote spot would, with his lovely wife, lead a life such as one sometimes reads of in idyls and romances but rarely sees reduced to

practice in this work-a-day world. Mr. Van Loal had appraised the Diamond at a very tolerable sum, and through his influence he would doubtless be able to dispose of it quietly, and in a way that would give rise to no suspicion as to the mode by which it had come into his possession. The proceeds of the sale, judiciously invested, would be productive of an annual income on which it would be possible to live in comfort wherever he might choose to pitch his tent. Lastly, all apprehension as to any results which might possibly have accrued to him from the sudden death of M. Platzoff, and the subsequent events at Bon Repos, had utterly died away. He had got by this time to feel as if the Diamond were as much his own as though it had been given to him or handed down to him as a family heirloom. If any uncomfortable thought connected with the death of Platzoff and his appropriation of the Diamond ever crossed his mind, it was dismissed with ignominy, like a poor relation, almost as soon as it made itself known. Captain Ducie was not a

man to let his conscience trouble him whenever it wished to question him respecting any transaction the results of which had proved prosperous to himself. In such cases he bade it begone, turning it out by main force, and shutting the door in its face. But whenever it stole in and began to reproach him for his conduct in any little affair that in its results had proved disastrous either socially or pecuniarily, then did Edmund Ducie bow his head in all humility before the veiled monitress, and cry mea culpa, and bewail his naughtiness with many inward groans, and promise to amend his ways in time to come. But it may be doubted whether in the latter case his regret did not arise less from having done that which was wrong, than because the wrong had proved unsuccessful in compassing the ends for which it was done.

Be that as it may, Captain Ducie's conscience did not seem to trouble him much as he came downstairs this pleasant autumn morning, humming an air from the Trovatore, and giving the last finishing touches to his filbert-shaped nails.

He rang the bell for breakfast, and turned over, half contemptuously, the selection of newspapers on the side table.

"Has Mr. Van Loal come down to breakfast yet, do you know?" he asked when the waiter re-entered the room.

"I will ascertain, sir, and let you know."

Two minutes later the waiter came back. "Mr. Van Loal, sir, and Miss Van Loal, left this morning by the Southampton boat."

"What!" shouted Ducie, jumping to his feet as though he had been shot.

The waiter repeated his statement.

"Either you are crazy or you have been misinformed," said Ducie, contemptuously, as he quietly resumed his seat. "Go again, and ascertain the truth this time."

Presently the waiter returned. "What I told you before, sir, is quite true. Mr. Van Loal and his daughter left this morning by the early boat."

A horrible sickening dread took possession of Ducie. He staggered to his feet, his face like

that of a corpse. Was it—was it possible that by some devil's trick the Diamond had been conjured from him? His hand went instinctively to the spot where he knew it ought to be. No—it was not gone. He could feel it there, just below his heart, in the little seal-skin bag that hung from his neck by a steel chain. He had replaced it there after taking it from the fingers of Van Loal the preceding night, and he had not looked at it since.

Greatly relieved, he turned to the waiter with a face that was still strangely white and contorted. "What you have just told me is almost incredible," he said. "In fact, I cannot believe it without further proof. Go and bring to me some one who was an eye-witness of the departure of Mr. and Miss Van Loal."

The waiter went. Ducie was still unnerved, and he poured himself out a cup of coffee with a hand that trembled in spite of all his efforts to keep it still. But his appetite for breakfast was utterly gone.

Then the waiter came back and ushered into

the room, first, the young lady who kept the accounts of the establishment; secondly, the boots. The young lady advanced with charming self-possession, made her little curtsy, and broke the ice at once.

"I am informed, sir, that you wish to have some particulars respecting the departure of Mr. and Miss Van Loal," she said. "They dined with you last evening in your own room, if I am not mistaken. Yes. Well, sir, about eleven o'clock, just as I was closing my books for the night, I was surprised by a visit from Mr. Van Loal. 'Oblige me by making out my little account,' said he; 'and include in it to-morrow's breakfast. I am recalled to England by important letters, and must go by the first boat. You will further oblige me by making no mention of my departure till after I am gone. I have several friends to whom I ought to say good-by, but I do not feel equal to the occasion, and wish to slip quietly away without saying a word.' Mr. Van Loal waited while I made out the account. Then he paid me and bade me good-

night. When I got up this morning, I found that he and his daughter had gone by the early boat. James, here, took their luggage down to the pier and saw them start."

"Did you with your own eyes see Mr. and Miss Van Loal start by the Southampton boat this morning?"

"I did, sir. I was instructed to look after their luggage this morning. I took it down to the boat and saw the old gentleman and the young lady safe aboard. They went below deck at once, and two minutes later the steamer was off."

"A very clear and conclusive narrative," said Ducie. "You are the man, I believe, who looks after the letters and attends to the post bag?"

"I am, sir."

"Were there any letters by the afternoon post yesterday for Mr. Van Loal?"

"No, sir, not one. I can speak positively to that."

Left alone, Captain Ducie sat down in a

perfect maze of perplexity. That Van Loal and his daughter were gone he could no longer doubt. But why had they gone without a hint or word of farewell? They must have known at the time they were dining with him the previous evening that they were about to sail on the following morning, and yet they allowed him to plan and arrange for the day's excursion as though any thought of change were the last thing in their minds. And Mirpah, too—what of her? What of the woman whom it was his intention to have proposed to that very day? Had she merely been playing with him all along in order that she might jilt him at last? He could not understand the thing at all. He was mazed, utterly dumbfounded, like a man walking in a dream. The more he thought of the affair, the less comprehensible it seemed to him. His amour propre was terribly wounded. More intolerable than all else was the sense there was upon him of having been outwitted, of having in some mysterious way been made the victim of a plot with the beginning and ending of which

he was utterly unacquainted. He had been hoodwinked—bamboozled—he felt sure of it: but how and for what purpose he was quite at a loss to fathom. His Diamond was perfectly safe; he had never gambled with Van Loal; whatever his looks might have conveyed, he had never spoken a word of love to Mirpah, so that it was impossible she could have taken offence with him on that score. What, then, was the meaning of it all? He rang the bell to inquire whether Mr. Van Loal had left no note, or message of any kind for him. None whatever, was the reply.

"What a preposterous idiot I must have been," murmured Ducie, "to fancy that this woman whom I proposed to make my wife, cared for me the least bit in the world! She is like the rest of her sex—neither better nor worse. From highest to lowest they are false and fickle—every one."

He spent a miserable day, wandering aimlessly about, he neither knew nor cared whither; nursing his wounds, and vainly striving to understand

for what reason he had been struck so mercilessly and in the dark. A thousand times that day he cursed the name of Mirpah Van Loal. Once he paused in his pacing of the lonely sands, and not satisfied with the evidence of his fingers that the Diamond was safe in its seal-skin pocket, he took it out of its hiding-place and gazed on it, and pressed it to his lips, even as M. Paul Platzoff had done in his time, and as, in all probability, hundreds had done before him.

"Fool! after all my experience of life and the world, to believe in the chimera of woman's love!" he said bitterly to himself. "Man's only real friend in this world is money, or that which can command money. The rest is only a shadow on the wall, gone ere it can be clutched."

He had been wandering about all day without food, and when night set in he felt nervous and dispirited.

He made a pretence of eating his dinner as usual, but he sickened at his food and sought consolation in a double allowance of wine.

Later on he strolled out with a cigar, and made his way to a certain billiard-room where he was not unknown. He was too nervous to touch a cue himself, but he found his excitement in betting on other men's play. After having lost five sovereigns he went back to his hotel. This was the night of Cleon's arrival at Jersey.

His mood next day was one of sullen bitterness. It was a mood that, under other circumstances, might have incited him to do something desperate, were it only to find a safety-valve for his pent-up feelings. In such a mood, had he been on active service, and had the need arisen, he would have gloried in offering himself as the leader of some forlorn hope. In such a mood, had he been a burglar, it would have fared ill with any one who stood up in defence of that which he had made up his mind to take as his own. Happily, or unhappily, in such crises of everyday life we have no choice save to eat our own hearts, and drink our own tears, and wear the mask of comedy to the world, while hiding that other mask of tragedy under our robe,

which we venture to don only when we are in secret and alone.

Captain Ducie, behind the mask of comedy which he presented to the world, hid a heart that in a few short hours had become surcharged with gall, and that would never again, however long his life might be, be entirely free from bitterness. He felt like one of those savage caged creatures who, when they have nothing else to war against, will sometimes turn and rend themselves. He felt that he should like to do himself some bodily injury: to put his foot under the car of Juggernaut, had he been a Hindoo; or to have swung, with a hook through his loins, above the populace of some Indian fair.

All day long he loafed about in this savage mood, smoking innumerable cigars and twisting the ends of his moustache viciously.

He was only anxious for one thing, and that was for the arrival of the afternoon post. It is possible that he expected some line of explanation from Van Loal. If so, he was disappointed. That day's post brought him no letters.

After dinner he joined a whist party in the coffee-room. Later on the quartette composing the party adjourned to a private-room upstairs. Captain Ducie was ordinarily an abstemious man, especially when cards were on the tapis, but to-night he was reckless and took more wine than was good for him. It was nearly one o'clock when the party broke up, and Captain Ducie never afterwards remembered how he reached his own room.

That he reached his room in safety cannot be doubted, because he found himself safely in bed when he awoke next morning. But before that time arrived a strange scene had been enacted in Captain Ducie's bedroom.

As before stated, it was nearly one o'clock when he reached his room, and five minutes after getting into bed he had fallen into a broken troubled sleep in which he enacted over again the varied incidents of the evening's play. After moaning and tossing about for more than an hour, he woke up, feeling parched from head to foot and with a pain across his forehead like a

fiery hoop that seemed to be slowly shrivelling up his brain. He got out of bed and emptied the decanter on his dressing-table at a draught. Then he plunged his head into a large basin of water, and that revived him still more. His head still ached, but not so violently as before. He went back to bed, cursing his folly for having taken so much wine. The night-light was burning as usual—dim and ghostly; barely sufficient to light up the familiar features of the room—for Captain Ducie had a strange superstitious horror of sleeping in the dark. He lay on his back, with his hands clasped above his head and with shut eyes. Sleep did not come back to him at once. His imagination went wandering here and there into odd nooks and corners that it had not visited for years. By-and-by he slid into a state of semi-unconsciousness, in which, without entirely losing all knowledge of time and place—of the fact that he was lying there in bed with a beastly headache—he yet mixed up certain scenes and events from dreamland, interfusing the real and the imaginary in

such a way that for the time being the line of demarcation between the two was utterly lost, and where one ended and the other began, he would just then have found it impossible to determine. He was playing cards with one of the huge stone images that guarded the gates of Memphis, and was yet at the same time conscious of being in bed. He could see the grotesque shadows thrown by the night-light on the wall, and he could hear the ticking of his watch in the little pocket a few inches above his head. In his game with the stone image, in whose eyes he seemed to read the garnered patience of many centuries, he was aware that unless he could succeed in trumping his adversary's trick with the five of clubs, the game would be irrevocably lost, and he, Ducie, would be condemned to be buried alive for five hundred years in the heart of the great Pyramid. The twentieth deal would be the last, and if the five of clubs were not forthcoming by that time, the game would be lost and the dread sentence would be carried into effect.

Deal after deal went on, and still the five of clubs did not show itself. Even in the midst of his perturbation he heard and counted the strokes of a clock in the silent house. The clock struck three, and in the act of deliberating which card he should play next, Ducie remarked to himself that it still wanted two hours till daybreak.

From minute to minute his perturbation increased. He did his best to maintain a calm front before his calm adversary. As he peered into those terrible eyes, he knew that he must expect no mercy if he failed in producing the magic card. Forgiveness and revenge were alike unknown to the inexorable being before him, who was the embodiment of Law, serene and passionless, neither to be hurried nor hindered, keeping ever to the simple white line traced out for its footsteps from the beginning of the world, and as utterly regardless of human joy or human sorrow, as of the grumbling of the earthquake or the fiery passion of the volcano.

Slowly but surely the game went on. Ducie's

adversary marked off every deal with a hieroglyph on a huge slate by his side. Fifteen—ten—five—the number of deals diminished one by one, and still the magic card was not forthcoming. Ducie went on playing with the quiet courage of despair. Five—four—three—two—one. The last deal had come but the five of clubs was still hidden in the pack. As he thought of the terrible fate before him his soul was utterly dismayed. Suddenly he heard a faint whisper in his ear: "Give me the Great Mogul Diamond and I will save you." "It is yours," he replied in the same tone. In a fainter whisper than before came the words: "Feel up your sleeve for the five of clubs."

Ducie put his hand up his sleeve and drew forth the magic card. As he dashed it on the table, cards and image melted silently away, all but the great calm eyes, which seemed to recede slowly from him while gazing at him with an inexorable gentleness that awed him, and crushed out of him all expressions of joy at his escape.

He had been conscious all this time of being

in his own room at the Royal George, and without being thoroughly awake, this consciousness was still upon him when he found himself left alone. Was he really quite alone? he asked himself. Some voice had whispered in his ear only a minute ago, and a voice implied a bodily presence. But whose presence?

He would doubtless know before long, when this unknown being would come forth to claim the great Diamond.

Well, better part from the Diamond than be made a living mummy of, and be buried for five hundred years among dead kings and priests in the great pyramid.

Was it Shakspeare who talked about "dusty death?" It did not matter. He had been saved from a dreadful fate, and a long peaceful sleep for one hundred and five hours, fifteeen minutes, and ten seconds—neither more nor less—was needed to compensate him for the mental and bodily torture from which he had just escaped.

Even while this fancy was simmering in his brain, he was aware of a strange, subtle odour

which seemed to rise from the floor in faint, cloud-like waves, rising and spreading till every nook and cranny of the room was pervaded by it. It was a mist of perfume—a perfume far from unpleasant to inhale—heavy, yet pungent, odorous of the East, inclining to sleep and to visions of a passionless existence, undisturbed by all outward influences—such visions as must come to the strange beings whose most central thought is that of future absorption in the mystic godhead of the mighty Brahma.

Empires might change and die, the world might split asunder and chaos rule again, it mattered not to him. Only to rest, to lie there for ever, self-absorbed, indifferent to all mundane matters—that was the utmost that he craved.

The mist of perfume thickened, becoming from minute to minute denser and more penetrating. By this time it seemed to have permeated his whole being. It filled his lungs, it mingled with his blood, it saturated his brain; it glowed in him, a slumberous heat, from head to foot. The shadowy past of his life, the real present of his

surroundings, grouped themselves in his brain like blurred photographs, which it was impossible for him to regard with anything more than a vague and impersonal interest. Nothing seemed real to him save the noiseless involved working of his own mind, working in and out like a shuttle with a fantastic thread of many colours, and with self for ever as the central figure.

While his mind had been growing thus strangely active, his body had been slowly losing —or rather suspending—its vitality. Slowly and imperceptibly his limbs had grown utterly powerless and inert, till now, if a kingdom had been offered him, he could not have raised hand or foot two inches from the bed. Not that he had any desire to move hand, or foot, or head, or tongue; only to lie still for ever, thinking his own thoughts, weighing the universe in the balance of his own mind and finding it wanting. Grant him but that, ye powers of earth and air, and for the rest, the word "nihil" might be written, and all things come to an end.

Suddenly through the mist of perfume that

filled the room he saw, or seemed to see, a black and threatening figure rise from the floor close by his bedside.

"Surely," he thought to himself, "this must be the presence belonging to the voice that whispered in my ear as I was playing cards with the Memphian image. He has come to claim his pledge—he has come for the Mogul Diamond."

To him, just now, the Mogul Diamond was as valueless as a grain of sand. That black and threatening figure by his bedside might take it and welcome.

"Strange," he thought, "that the minds of men should ever grow to such trifles."

The power of despising others thoroughly, but without emotion, is one of the final products of pure intellect: and to that serene height he had now attained.

The black figure bent over him. In one hand it held a dagger.

Ducie felt no alarm. Such a human emotion as fear affected him not, nor quickened the equable pulses of his being.

As the face pertaining to the figure bent nearer to his own, he recognised it as the face of Cleon the mulatto. Even then he was not surprised. The mulatto made as though he would have struck Ducie to the heart, but stopped the dagger when it was within an inch of his breast. He passed his other hand across his forehead, and seemed to stagger.

Was it possible that the powerful odour was affecting him as it had affected his victim? He hurriedly replaced his dagger in its sheath, and putting his hand to Ducie's neck, as if he knew instinctively that such a thing was there, he felt for the chain from which was suspended the seal-skin pouch that held the Diamond. He had no difficulty in finding the chain, nor the sachet, nor the Diamond. He extracted the great flashing gem from its hiding-place, even as Ducie had extracted it a few weeks before from the head of the Indian idol. He held it up between his eye and the night-lamp, and muttered a few guttural words to himself.

Then for the second time he passed his hand

across his forehead and staggered. As if warned that he had not a moment to spare, he stuffed the Diamond into his mouth, gave a last scowl at the helpless figure before him, and disappeared behind the curtains that fell round the head of the bed.

Ducie was left alone.

All that had just taken place had affected him no more than if he had witnessed it as a scene out of a play. The Great Diamond was gone, and not even a ripple disturbed the waveless serenity of his mind.

But the subtle odour that had filled the room was slowly fading out, and as it grew fainter, so did the strange spell that had held Ducie captive begin to lose its power. His thoughts lost their crystalline clearness, becoming blurred and unwieldy. They no longer arranged themselves in proper sequence. Some of them became so cumbersome that they had to be dropped and left behind, while those that were more nimble strayed so far ahead as to be almost beyond recall. Then the nimble ones had to come back

and try to pick up the unwieldy ones, till they all became jumbled together and lost their individuality. Finally, sleep came to the rescue and laid her mantle softly over them, and for a little while all was peace.

CHAPTER VII.

CHASING LA BELLE ROSE.

It was broad day when Captain Ducie awoke. Even before his eyes were open, or he was conscious of where he was, there was upon him the overwhelming sense of some great calamity.

His gaze wandered round the familiar room, and as it did so, he asked himself what it was that had befallen him.

Before he had time to consider the question, or even to answer it, a great shock went through his heart, and with a loud cry he sprang from his bed on to the floor.

"The Diamond!"

He felt for it. It was gone. Even before his fingers had time to touch the seal-skin pouch his instinct told him that it was not there. He

turned as white as a man at the point of death, and sank into a chair with a deep groan. His chin dropped on his breast, and two great tears rolled slowly from his eyes and fell to the ground.

A disarrangement of the carpet attracted his eye. It had been turned back for the space of a yard or so, leaving the boards bare. On this bare patch was a tiny cone of white ash.

Ducie's suspicions were aroused in a moment. He stooped and took up a pinch of the ash and smelt at it. It emitted a faint odour, similar to that more powerful odour which had overcome him so strangely in the course of the night.

No recollection of his dream, or of that still more singular vision in which Cleon had acted so prominent a part, had touched his memory since waking. But now, by one of those peculiar mental processes with which all of us are familiar, although we may not be able to explain them, the faint perfume that still pervaded the ash he had taken up between his fingers brought vividly back to his recollection every scene, real and

imaginary, in which he had acted a part during his sleeping hours.

The five of clubs and his game of cards with the Memphian statue—he remembered that, and he at once put it aside as nothing more than a dream of a somewhat bizarre character. After that, the strange odour that filled his room, precisely similar to that of the ash in his hand; the sudden apparition of Cleon; the dagger, and the rape of the Diamond: were those things dreams or realities? Dreams, nothing but idle dreams, he should have replied at any other time, but with the sense of his irreparable loss eating into his very soul, he could only acknowledge that for him they made up a bitter reality.

Cleon had been there in person, and had succeeded in stealing the Diamond.

With a terrible string of imprecations on the mulatto's head, Ducie flung open the casement, and let in the sweet morning air. There were two more tiny cones of white ash, similar to the first, on other parts of the floor.

"That fiend of a mulatto has obtained access to

my room," muttered Ducie to himself. "The powerful odour which had such a strange effect upon me must have been emitted by the pastilles, the ashes of which are before me. The pastilles were doubtless compounded of some strong narcotics, probably of certain Oriental drugs with the qualities of which Cleon was acquainted. I have been the victim of an infernal plot."

That Cleon had been there could not be doubted; but where was he now? Ducie halted in his troubled walk as this question put itself to him, and turned to examine the door. It was unbolted, but otherwise shut. His custom was to bolt it every night before getting into bed; but did he really bolt it last night? He could not recollect. Considering the state in which he was when he came to bed, was not the probability in favour of his having left it unfastened? In any case, that was now a point of little consequence. The Diamond was gone, and Cleon was doubtless gone with it. The mulatto was not such a fool as to remain in the neighbourhood of a man whom he had mortally offended, especially when

his interests imperatively demanded that he should get safely away. Between him and Ducie the case was now one of life and death.

A fresh thought struck him and he turned to look at his watch. It was a quarter past six. The Southampton boat did not sail till a quarter to seven. Was it not most probable that Cleon, calculating on his, Ducie's, not awaking till after that time, would attempt to leave the island by the early boat? It was most probable that he would do so. "But if he leaves Jersey, I leave it with him," murmured the captain. "I shall certainly kill him the first opportunity I have of doing so."

Captain Ducie's window commanded a view of that end of the pier from which the steamer started. He could see a knot of passengers and their luggage already assembled. It was hardly likely that the mulatto would be one of the lot, still Ducie thought that he might as well satisfy himself on that point. On his dressing-table was a very powerful field-glass. Ducie took it up and directed it full on the clump of people

at the end of the pier. His eye ranged over the component parts one by one, but no Cleon was to be seen. He was hardly disappointed, because he had not expected to find the mulatto there. Before putting down the glass, with an instinct that to him was like second nature, he swept the horizon of sky and sea with it. Elizabeth Castle and the whole expanse of St. Aubin's Bay were visible to him. The morning was clear—deceitfully clear—and Ducie's experienced eye told him that a change of weather was at hand. Coming back from the horizon his eye took in the features nearer home. One or two pair-oar boats were paddling lazily about just outside the harbour. Beyond them were three or four sailing boats with their white wings outspread to catch the light and fickle breeze which seemed this morning as if it could not make up its mind to blow steadily from one point for more than five minutes at a time. The outermost of the sailing boats was tacking out of the harbour with every inch of its tiny sails spread to catch the wind. In this boat were three men, two of them sailors,

the third evidently a passenger, probably some visitor to the island going out on a fishing excursion. Such would have been Ducie's natural conclusion had he cared to think about the matter at all. The boat came for a moment within the range of his glass, and in that moment one of the three men turned his head as if to see what progress had been made from land. He turned his head and Ducie gave a start and a cry. The man who had looked back was none other than the mulatto.

One more steady look at the boat and its occupants and then Captain Ducie went on dressing with all speed. He understood the case in a moment. Cleon would not venture to leave the island by the steamer, fearing, probably, that she might be boarded by Ducie before leaving. His plan had been to hire a smack to take him either to the French coast or to Guernsey, and had it not happened to be dead low water about the time he ought to have got away, and the boats to be all lying high and dry in the harbour, two facts which had probably never entered into his

calculations, he would have been a dozen miles from St. Helier by this time, and might have set pursuit at defiance.

In five minutes Captain Ducie was ready to start. His field-glass was slung over his shoulder. In one pocket of his gray shooting-jacket he carried a Colt's revolver, and in the other a flask containing brandy, and a few biscuits.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken," muttered Ducie to himself as he made his way with rapid strides towards the basin, "my friend Martin's little *Demoiselle* will outsail yonder clumsy craft on a light wind, in which case Mr. Cleon and I may have an earlier reckoning than he dreams of."

Captain Ducie was fortunate enough to find his friend Martin smoking an early pipe by the edge of the basin, and watching his tiny craft with a loving eye as she curtsied lightly to the incoming tide. Martin was a handsome stalwart young fellow whose ancestors for five hundred years back had followed the same occupation in

the same place. Ducie had employed him several times on fishing excursions, and the two were sufficiently well known to each other. His boat, *La Demoiselle,* was famed, in the hands of her master, as being one of the fleetest little craft on the island.

A few words sufficed to let Martin understand what was required of him, and three minutes later the *Demoiselle* with outspread wings was skimming saucily over the crests of the tide in pursuit of the other boat, which Martin pronounced to be the *Belle Rose.* Martin's assistant had been left behind in order that the *Demoiselle* might sail as lightly as possible, Ducie himself engaging to assist in working the little craft.

La Belle Rose had got a clear half-hour's start, and was working out nearly due south, that being her best tack for sailing as the wind then was. "She'll take a turn sou'east before another ten minutes is over," said Martin. "You see, sir, if she don't; and then she'll make straight for the Normandy coast."

"Martin," said Captain Ducie impressively, "on board yonder boat is a man who has robbed me of that which was of more importance to me than all else in the world."

"Master!" exclaimed Martin, in surprise.

"What I say is true. Now, listen. I want my revenge—as you would want yours were you in my place—eh?"

Martin nodded his head gravely, and drew a knife in pantomime.

"Consequently," resumed Ducie, "I want you to catch *La Belle Rose*. She has got a long start. Can you come up with her?"

"Master, I will try. The *Demoiselle* has never failed me yet when I've put her to the proof, and I don't think she will fail me to-day. We must steer more easterly, and not as if we were following the other boat; and then when she tacks, as she must do soon, we shall have gained a full half mile on her."

Ducie was steering, and he saw that by following the sailor's advice, the *Demoiselle* would

cut off a large slice of the angle which must necessarily be made by the *Belle Rose* before she could touch the nearest part of the French coast. Besides which, such a course would divert suspicion from their real intentions, and in a stern chase that goes for something.

Ducie lighted a cigar, and passed his flask forward to the young sailor. "We shall have rain and more wind, sir, before the day is three hours older," said the latter.

"So much the better," answered Ducie, quietly. "A gloomy deed should have a gloomy day. Martin! either the man in yonder boat or I will never see another sunrise. Perhaps neither of us may."

The young sailor gave his companion a look that was not unmixed with admiration. There was something that touched his wild notions of Justice in the idea of a man being his own Avenger.

Captain Ducie really meant what he said. He was thoroughly impressed with the belief that either for himself or Cleon that would be

the last of earthly days. There was an element of gloom at the bottom of his nature—a dark abyss that had never been thoroughly sounded till a few hours ago. But the loss of his Diamond, preceded as it was by the unaccountable desertion of Mirpah Van Loal—Love and Fortune both gone in a few short hours—had served to raise a demon in his soul of which he had heretofore been thoroughly master. Now it mastered him, and he gave himself up to it without a struggle. But the grand calm of a thoroughbred Englishman did not desert him even now. The young sailor discerned no change in him from the Captain Ducie who had gone out fishing but four days before, save, perhaps, that his eyebrows seemed to come down a shade lower, and that the eyes themselves were a shade darker, and that his voice was somewhat graver than common. Otherwise there was no outward sign to tell of the change within, and yet Jean Martin had an instinctive sense that he had a desperate man aboard his tiny craft—one determined to carry

out his own will to the end, however terrible that end might be.

Captain Ducie sat in the stern and steered the *Demoiselle*, taking the word occasionally from Jean Martin. His glass was beside him, and now and then he took a peep at the chase. The different tacks on which the two boats were steering would have seemed, in a landsman's eye, to be hopelessly widening the distance between them, but when the *Belle Rose* suddenly yawed round and began to steer nearly due east of her previous course, Ducie saw the wisdom of Martin's advice. The two boats had, so to speak, been sailing down the opposite sides of a triangle. The *Belle Rose* had completed her side, and having turned the corner, was now sailing along the line of the base. But before she could reach the opposite end of the base, she would be intercepted by the *Demoiselle*.

Up to this time the progress of the *Demoiselle* seemed to have been unheeded by the people in the *Belle Rose*. But as soon as it became evident

to those in the latter that the two boats were rapidly nearing, and must in a few minutes cross each other's line within speaking distance, a slight commotion was visible on board the *Belle Rose*. Suddenly Martin, who had Ducie's glass to his eye, cried out, "They are getting suspicious of us. They are taking stock of us through their glasses—and—no—yes, by the nightcap of St. Jaques! there's a black man on board the *Belle Rose!*"

"He is the man of whom I am in pursuit," said Ducie, from the stern. Then he added:

"Keep your eye on them, Martin. Watch every movement, and tell me all you see."

"They have not seen your face yet, master, and they seem easier in their minds. But the black man keeps his glass to his eye. Ah, thief! scélérat! Jean Martin would like to have his fingers round your throat! Do you wish me to run close up to the *Belle Rose*, master? In five minutes you may, if you like, have yon black hound in your grip."

"Come you to the tiller now, Martin, and

steer to within twenty yards of the *Belle Rose*, but no nearer unless I tell you."

So the two men changed places, and Ducie went forward with the glass in his hand. Cleon on his side was watching every movement on board the *Demoiselle*. Up to the present time the person of Captain Ducie had been in great part hidden by the sail, but now that he came forward he was plainly visible. The moment Cleon's glass showed him that stern pale face, he fell back on his seat with an exclamation of terror, and seemed for a moment or two like one utterly paralysed. But the mulatto was by no means deficient in a sort of dogged animal courage, and the extremity of his peril left him no time for anything but immediate action. The two boats were now within fifty yards of each other, the *Demoiselle* bearing down like an arrow on the track of the *Belle Rose*. The mulatto took one more peep through his glass at Ducie. In the hand of the latter was an ugly-looking revolver.

Cleon could not doubt for what purpose it

was intended, and he was too well acquainted with Ducie's undoubted skill with the weapon, having seen him practice with it several times at Bon Repos, not to know that his chance of life would hang on the merest thread if Ducie were once to pull the trigger. One look at the revolver was sufficient. Cleon spoke to the man at the tiller. The course of the boat was at once altered. The sail lost its wind, flapped for a moment or two against the mast like the broken wing of a bird, then caught the breeze on the opposite tack, and the *Belle Rose* coming sharply round through the hissing water turned her nose nearly due west and began to retrace the way she had come. Captain Ducie smiled grimly. "If the cur thinks to escape me by going back to St. Helier and claiming the protection of the law, he will find himself mistaken. I will shoot him through the heart the moment his foot touches the pier."

Straight as a hawk after its quarry the *Demoiselle* at once followed up in the wake of the other boat. The *Demoiselle* had still some canvas

to spare, and had she spread it, could easily have come up with the *Belle Rose*. But it was not Ducie's aim to do so.

Somewhat to Ducie's surprise, the *Belle Rose* instead of turning northward and so making for the harbour of St. Helier, kept on her westerly course, and shot clean past the entrance, and so kept on till Elizabeth Castle was passed on the right, and both the boats found themselves skirting the outer edge of St. Aubin's Bay and Normont Point could be seen stretching out a rocky hand as if to bar their way. Ducie was puzzled, but said nothing. Could it be the mulatto's intention to skirt the western side of the island and make for Guernsey? But he would be no better off there than at Jersey. He, Ducie, would follow him to the very gates of Perdition.

Martin's prediction had been verified. By this time the morning had clouded over, the wind was freshening, and a light drizzling rain had begun to fall. It would be no pleasant voyage, truly, on such a day to cross the thirty

miles of broken water between the two islands, and in so frail a craft. But what the *Belle Rose* dared do, that also dared the *Demoiselle.*

Normont Point was quickly passed, and soon St. Brelade's romantic Bay opened into view. Martin still steered, and Ducie still crouched like a wary sentinel in the fore part of the boat. The mulatto was no longer to be seen. He had probably stretched himself out at the bottom of the boat, dreading lest Ducie might take it into his head to fire. Why Ducie had not already fired was probably a source of surprise to him.

La Moye Point which shuts in St. Brelade's Bay on the west, was neared and passed, and there, no great distance away, were the dread Corbière rocks wading out into the sea to entrap unwary mariners, smitten by the great waves and shrouding themselves in clouds of snowy spray. And now the head of the *Belle Rose* was turned northward, as if she were about to make for the shore. Ducie saw that the mulatto was about to take one of two courses: either to run full on

the beach and so try to lose his pursuer among the rocks and caves which abound on that part of the island; or else to run his boat through some of the narrow and dangerous passages between the Corbières, on the chance of the *Demoiselle* not venturing to follow, and so gain sufficient headway by means of the short cut to render further pursuit hopeless. Ducie smiled to himself to think how futile the mulatto's efforts would be in either case.

It soon appeared that the hunted man had decided to take to the land as affording the best chance of escape. Close by was a small sandy nook that was sheltered between two protruding spurs of rock from the full swing of the tide. Into this tiny cove the *Belle Rose* shot with furled sail, and before her keel had fairly touched the sand, the mulatto was out of the boat and scrambling up the shelving beach with the agility of a tiger cat. He just passed out of sight behind a broken fragment of rock as the *Demoiselle* shot round the spur and followed the *Belle Rose* into the little bay. Ducie pressed

two sovereigns into the palm of Jean Martin and then leaped ashore. Cleon's footprints were plainly visible in the soft sand, and he followed them up with the instinct of a blood-hound.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAVE OF ST. LAZARE.

Captain Ducie had one immense advantage over the man of whom he was in pursuit: he knew the Island thoroughly, having lived on it for several years when a boy at school. With that portion of it especially which stretches from St. Brelade on the south to Greve-de-Lecq on the north, he was intimately acquainted. Without much exaggeration it might be said that he knew every yard of the ground. Accordingly, when he had tracked the footprints of the mulatto to a point where the sandy beach ended and the shelving rock began, he troubled himself no further about them, but climbing straight up the face of the cliff with an agility that few men of his years could have imitated, he neither halted nor looked

back till he had reached a small overhanging bluff that commanded the entire range of the precipice up which he had just clambered. This range of rock was only about a hundred yards in extent, and was shut in at the opposite end by another bluff which stretched out so far that its foot was already covered by the advancing tide.

From the smaller bluff, which Ducie had chosen as his eyrie, he could see every living thing larger than a rat that might move either along the sands or attempt to climb the rock. At the foot of this rock where it touched the sands there were several fissures large enough for two or three men to hide in. In addition to these there was a still larger opening known as the Cave of St. Lazare. Now, it was quite evident to Ducie that the mulatto must be in hiding either in one of the minor fissures or in the cave itself, so that all he had to do was to wait patiently till Cleon should choose to quit his lair.

It is true that he might have gone down

to the sands and have sought an encounter with the mulatto at close quarters. But he had an ugly recollection of Cleon's skill with the knife; besides which he had something of that feeling which induces a cat to play with a mouse before finally putting it out of its misery. So he crept forward on his hands and knees over the wet grass to the edge of the bluff, and there ensconced himself behind a thick clump of brushwood whence he could see, without being seen, everything that might transpire on the sands.

His first care was to satisfy himself as to the condition of his revolver. When he had made his mind easy on that score, he took a pull at his brandy flask and munched a biscuit, but still keeping a wary watch for the faintest movement below.

The *Demoiselle* and the *Belle Rose* had disappeared already, those in charge of them being intent on getting back to St. Helier as quickly as possible, for the weather was threatening. A drizzling rain was still falling, and Ducie was by no means sorry that such was the case: no

prying tourists would think of visiting the cave on such a day.

The grim Corbière rocks were lashing themselves with whips of spray, like monks doing penance, and a heavy tide was rolling rapidly in. The strip of sand at the foot of the rocks was growing narrower from minute to minute, and soon the whole of it would be hidden.

"He must come out of his den before long, if he does not wish to be drowned like a rat in its hole," muttered Ducie to himself as he marked the creaming billows frothing up almost to the foot of the rock. "I shall not have long to wait."

In fact, only two courses were left open to the mulatto: either to show himself and climb the rock under cover of Ducie's revolver, or else to remain in hiding till the tide swept up and drowned him. From Ducie's post of vantage the narrow entrance to the cave—so narrow that only one person could enter at a time—was clearly visible.

The advancing tide had completely swallowed up the strip of sand and was licking the foot of the precipice before the slightest sign of human life was discernible below. Ducie crouching behind the bushes, with his hand on his revolver, and every nerve in his body on the alert, watched and waited in silence. The first thing that he saw was a yellow claw protruded from the interior of the cave. This claw grasped the edge of the rock, and next moment a yellow face was pushed out, the two terror-stricken bloodshot eyes of which roved frantically around as in search of some unseen foe. But there was nothing to be seen save the inrushing tide, the barren rock above and around, and a clump of brushwood on the cliff bending before the wind. Apparently reassured, he crept wholly out of hiding, and after another cautious look round, he turned his face to the cliff and began to climb. But he had not made more than two steps upward when the sudden ping of a pistol smote his ear, and the same instant a bullet struck the rock about two feet above his head, breaking off some fragments

which rattled down into the sea. The mulatto gave utterance to a wild yell of terror, and loosing his foothold, he slipped back into the water which now reached up to his knees. Another moment and he had disappeared within the cave. Better run the risk of being drowned than again put himself in the way of that terrible revolver. It is doubtful whether he was aware that every high tide completely filled up the cavern. He may have thought that by climbing on to some of the higher ledges inside he would be safe till the subsidence of the water, by which time his enemy might probably be tired of waiting for him, or salvation might come in the shape of help from others. In any case, to venture outside the cave was certain death; to stop inside may have seemed to afford some chance of ultimate escape. But Ducie was well aware that to stop inside was certain death. When firing his revolver, his intention had been to frighten Cleon back into hiding, not to wound or kill him. It would be so much pleasanter if Cleon would allow himself to be quietly drowned in the cave,

instead of compelling him, Ducie, to put a bullet through his head. There might be people foolish enough to construe such a transaction as the one last named into wilful murder. The former could be put down as nothing more than an ugly accident.

So Ducie watched and waited, fully determined that by one mode or the other Cleon should that day come by his death. The tide rose higher and higher, but no yellow horror-stricken face was seen again outside the entrance to the cave. Then Ducie knew what would happen within. By and bye the green lips of the waves kissed the roof of the doorway. Then Ducie knew that all was over, and that he had only to wait for the subsidence of the tide. He finished the brandy in his flask, and lighted a cigar, and waited.

It was considerably past mid-day before the water was low enough for him to venture into the cave. When he did venture in the water came up to his waist. He waded slowly in, grasping the slippery rock carefully at each step that he

took. He knew what he should find inside, and for the first time a feeling of awe crept over him. At length he stood in the middle of the cave and ventured to look round. A dim green light pervaded the place, too faint to discern anything that might be there. Ducie was not unprepared for such an emergency. He had brought with him a small box of the wax matches he sometimes used for lighting his cigar. He struck one of these on the bottom of the box and held it aloft. It burned for a minute, and that minute served to show him a black shapeless heap of humanity lodged high up on one of the ledges of rock. To that spot the mulatto had climbed in the vain hope of escaping the ever-rising tide.

There was another ledge close to the one on which the body lay. On to this ledge Ducie climbed, and by kneeling on one knee and leaning over he could touch the dead man. He wanted to ascertain whether he had the Great Mogul Diamond hidden anywhere about his person.

"What if he has swallowed it? What if he

has thrown it into the sea?" Ducie asked himself. Then his hand touched the dead man's cheek, and he shuddered from head to foot.

He paused for a moment or two, and with an intense effort steadied his nerves to go through the task he had set himself to do. It was gone through carefully and thoroughly, but the Diamond was nowhere to be found. At length Ducie paused in sheer despair.

"He has evidently made away with the Diamond when he found that he could not escape, and so has carried his revenge beyond the grave," muttered Ducie.

Suddenly a thought struck him. Once more he bent over the dead man, and with both hands wrenched open his mouth. Another instant, and he had found the Diamond hidden away under the tongue that would never speak more.

Strong man though he was, the revulsion of feeling was almost more than he could bear. Tears of joy came into his eyes. He needed a minute or two to recover himself. As soon as his heart began to beat more calmly, he wrapped

the Diamond in his handkerchief and stuffed the whole into an inner pocket of his waistcoat. Then he leaped down on to the sandy floor of the cave, and leaving the dead man on his rocky bed, he waded out by the way he had come; and having breasted the hill, he set out at a sharp pace across the moorland on his way to St. Helier. His clothes had been soaked through and through in the course of the day, but just now he was not in a frame of mind to give any thought to such a trifle.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VERDICT OF MR. VERMUSEN.

Captain Ducie had a long wet walk back to his hotel, and by the time he reached it he felt thoroughly exhausted. He had a bath, and dined, and spent a quiet evening in the smoke-room, with no company save that of his own thoughts.

There was a deep underglow of satisfaction in his heart at recovering the Diamond, but there was one pressing question that required his immediate decision.

The body of the mulatto would in all probability be found on the morrow, or, at the latest, in the course of the following day. Although there could be little doubt that his death would be set down to pure accident, still an inquiry

would be set on foot as to his name, position in life, &c., and the affair would be a nine days' wonder in the little island. The boatmen would naturally state that he, Captain Ducie, had been seen in the mulatto's company only a few hours before he came by his death; justice, in the persons of a coroner and twelve jurymen, would take cognizance of the affair; and he would be called upon to state the reason of his persistent pursuit of the mulatto, and what passed between them after landing at the bay of St. Lazare. Such an inquiry would be distasteful to him in every way, and it seemed to him that the wisest thing he could do would be to start for England by the morning steamer. He would spend a couple of days in London, and then set out for Paris.

Once in the French capital, he must look out for some means of disposing of his Diamond. That was a negotiation which could not much longer be delayed.

His available funds were within a few sovereigns of being exhausted, and all his well-to-do friends had turned their backs on him long ago.

But all his well-to-do friends might go hang. For the future he should be independent of them and their charity.

He should take up his permanent residence abroad: continental life was so much freer and more sociable than our cold-blooded insular mode of wearing out existence.

He was still very sore on the subject of Mirpah Van Loal, and he would be so for some time to come. He winced mentally whenever her image crossed his mind. His self-love had been terribly wounded by her desertion of him; but beyond that there was an element of mystery about the sudden disappearance of herself and her father that puzzled him exceedingly.

Change of scene might be beneficial to him in more senses than one: he had better get away from the island as soon as possible.

He called for his bill and settled it, so that it might not delay his departure in the morning, after which his balance of ready money was reduced to a trifle. He must raise a few sovereigns on his watch when he got to London, otherwise

he would hardly have sufficient to take him across the Channel.

As the clock struck ten, he took his bed-candle and went upstairs. He put back the Diamond in the place from which it had been taken by the mulatto—that is to say, in the seal-skin pouch that hung by a steel chain round his neck.

Before getting into bed he did not fail to subject his room to a careful examination, nor to satisfy himself as to the security of his door. He was terribly tired, and in five minutes after putting his head on the pillow he was soundly asleep.

He awoke all in a moment.

The night-lamp in his room, burning dim and low, just served to show that all was still dark outside. He awoke all in a moment, with the terribly vivid sensation of a cold wet hand laid heavily across his mouth. He started up in bed with a shudder that shook him from head to foot. He expected to see something near him—what, he could not have told.

The sight of the familiar features of his own

room swept away his fright at once, but he could not quite so readily get over the sensation of sickness and disgust, which affected him as deeply as if the hand had been a real one. His lips felt dry and parched, and he put out his tongue to wet them.

Again he shuddered. His lips tasted of salt water—tasted as if he had been drinking sea-water, and had allowed the salt to dry on them.

The hand that had been laid across his face was cold and wet, and smelled of the sea.

He leaped out of bed, feeling utterly upset. On looking at his watch he found that it was just four o'clock. There would be no daylight for another hour.

"Serve me right for eating that lobster," he said. "A man at my time of life has no business with suppers of any kind. If people will trifle with their digestive organs, they must expect to suffer for their folly."

He did not get into bed again, not caring to risk a repetition of that terrible sensation. Instead, he wrapped himself in a warm overcoat,

selected a comfortable chair, lighted his meerschaum, and smoked away till day had fairly broken, and it was time to wash and dress in readiness for the steamer.

He was turning over some toilet appurtenances when his eye caught the corner of a letter protruding from under the looking-glass. He drew it out and found that it was addressed to himself, and that it bore the London post-mark. It had doubtless been laid on the table with the view of catching his eye, and then by some accident had got slipped under the glass. He opened it with some curiosity, saw that it was in a man's writing, and then glanced at the signature before beginning to read it.

The colour mounted into his cheek as he read the signature, "Solomon Van Loal," and with eager curiosity he turned back to the beginning.

The letter began without either date or address, and ran as under:—

"Sir,—The most cunning people are apt to deceive themselves at times, and few people are

so easily gulled, when their suspicions are not aroused, as those who make a point of preying upon others. You, sir, in your own person, afford a conspicuous example of the truth of the above remarks.

"In extreme cases, where, for instance, a great wrong has to be righted, it sometimes becomes necessary to fight Fraud with its own weapons. If it is smitten, shall it cry out? if it is outwitted and compelled to disgorge its ill-gotten gains, shall it make a noise in the market-place? Let it rather fold its cloak decently about its head, and go on its way in silence, thankful that its shoulders have escaped the whip of justice for a little while longer.

"I speak in no unmeaning parables, Captain Ducie. More underlies my words than may at first sight appear. If you do not understand my meaning when you read this, you will not long remain in ignorance of it.

"One word of warning in conclusion. Much of that which you believe to be locked up in your own bosom is known to me in all its details.

There are certain episodes, having reference to your sojourn at Bon Repos, which you would hardly care to have made public. Take the advice of him who writes this letter, and keep a discreet tongue in your head, otherwise you will make an implacable enemy of one who can work you more harm than you are aware of, and who now signs himself,

"Yours as you may prove to deserve it,

"Solomon Van Loal."

"What, in the fiend's name, does it all mean?" asked Captain Ducie, when he had read to the end of the letter. "Is the man mad, or am I drunk?" His face was very white, but there was an ugly frown on it, as he sat staring at the letter as if he could hardly believe it to be anything more than a foolish hoax. "By heaven! if I had the writer of it here I would twist his neck, old as he is!"

Then he read the letter carefully through again, weighing it sentence by sentence. When he had done, he put it back into its envelope,

and looked up with quite a frightened expression in his eyes.

"What does the old fool mean by 'fighting Fraud with its own weapons?' and by 'compelling me to disgorge my ill-gotten gains?' In what way has he 'gulled' me? He has taken nothing of mine, unless——"

He was too sick at heart to finish the sentence even to himself, but with a hand that trembled like that of an old man, he drew forth his seal-skin sachet, opened it, and took out of it the Great Mogul Diamond. He took it out with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, and laid it on the palm of his left. There it rested, lustrous, glowing, unmatchable, absorbing the purest rays of the morning into itself, and then flinging them back intensified a thousandfold. The colour came back to Captain Ducie's cheek, his heart resumed its equable beating, and nothing save an almost imperceptible trembling of the hand betrayed the crisis of feeling through which he had just passed.

"What a precious idiot I must be to allow

myself to be frightened by the riddles of an old ass like Van Loal! The fellow must be crazy. No doubt he felt an attack coming on, and that was the reason why he left so abruptly. And so enough of him. Not even for the fair Mirpah's sake could I tolerate a lunatic father-in-law. Ah! my beauty," apostrophising the Diamond, "so long as I have you, or the worth of you, what care I how the world wags? You are my only true consolation—my only real friend! Come, *amigo mio*, let you and I, for the benefit and information of such persons as may tenant this chamber in time to come, write down Mr. Solomon Van Loal as an ass. On the middle pane of the middle window, in prominent letters, we will write him down an ass."

The conceit pleased him, and he crossed the floor with the Diamond in his hands, and a malicious smile on his lips, to work out his poor morsel of revenge. He selected the spot with care, right in the centre of the middle pane. He gave a preliminary flourish with his hand, and was about to make the first stroke, but paused.

"I'll put my initials, E.D., under it," he said, and the malicious smile deepened as he spoke, "so that if the old rascal ever comes here again he may know to whom he is indebted for his brief immortality."

Then he gave his arm a second flourish, and essayed the first stroke.

With one of the facets of the Diamond he made the first curve of the letter S. But no mark followed.

Again he essayed to make the stroke, and again the glass remained as free from scratch or mark as if he had striven to write on it with a common quill. A mist came over his eyes, and he sank, half fainting, into the nearest chair.

"Ruined! irretrievably ruined!" he cried aloud in a voice of utter anguish. "That consummate villain has stolen the real Diamond, and has left me a worthless imitation in its place! Now—now I understand his letter. Now I understand why I was befooled by his daughter."

The worthless gem had dropped from his

fingers, and lay unheeded on the floor. He sat staring at it with lacklustre eyes for a full half-hour. All his patience, his ingenuity, his underhand working—the death of Platzoff, the stealing of the Diamond, the murder of Cleon—had ended in this, that he had been outwitted by one more cunning than himself. And could he complain that he had been otherwise than rightly punished for what he had done? But he did not complain. Hope had died out utterly in his heart; and when that is the case with any one, he is beyond vain repinings. The future? He dared not look at it. The dull, dead present was quite as much as his brain could dwell on just now.

He rose after a while and picked up the Diamond; and going to the window, he again essayed with one facet after another to make even the faintest scratch on the glass. But his latter efforts were as futile as his first had been. Then the thought struck him, and it was a thought that sent a brief glow of hope to his heart, that there might, perhaps, be something peculiar in the cutting of the Diamond which precluded it

from marking the window; that its angles might be too much rounded, or something of that sort. The only way by which he could satisfy himself whether he had been duped or no—whether the Diamond was a real or an imitation one—was to take it to some one thoroughly conversant with such things, and obtain his verdict thereon. Even while this thought was in his mind, it came into his memory that he had seen a quaint little shop, in a certain out-of-the-way street in St. Helier, with this legend painted over the window: *H. Vermusen, Lapidary, and Dealer in Precious Stones.* He remembered it from thinking at the time that he might, perchance, call some day on Mr. Vermusen, and show him the Diamond.

To this man he would at once go. These alternations of hope and fear were killing him. He would put off his departure from the island till to-morrow. Even if Cleon's body had been already found, it would take more than another day to so complete the chain of evidence as to bring home the fact that he, Ducie, had been in

any way concerned in the mulatto's death. He was safe for another twenty-four hours.

He looked at his watch. Time had flown rapidly. It was now a quarter past six. Would the lapidary's shop be open at that early hour? Hardly. He would finish dressing, and go out on to the sands, and there wait till the clock should strike eight.

As the church clock struck eight, Captain Ducie opened the door of Mr. Vermusen's shop. Mr. Vermusen himself came out of a dark inner den to wait upon his early visitor. A spectacled, high-nosed old gentleman, in a black velvet skull-cap, and a faded velvet dressing-gown.

"In what can I have the pleasure of serving you, sir?" he asked with a slow rubbing of his lean hands and a sharp glance over his spectacles at Captain Ducie's pale haughty face.

Ducie had thoroughly made up his mind during his solitary walk along the sands to bear whatever the diamond-merchant might have to tell him, whether it were good news or bad, with-

out any outward tokens either of elation or dismay. When, therefore, he answered Mr. Vermusen's question his voice was even more low and equable than usual, but he could not altogether hide the anxiety that lurked in his eyes.

"You are a lapidary and dealer in precious stones, I believe?" Mr. Vermusen bowed.

"I have here an object—a something—the value of which I wish to ascertain. It was found a few days ago by a sister of mine at the bottom of an old oak chest that had not been opened for quite forty years. The chest was full of old family papers—leases, title deeds, what not—none of which had been needed for a very long time. Having occasion, however, to look for some missing document, the chest was emptied, and, as already said, this article was found at the bottom. My sister has sent it to me with the view of ascertaining its value."

While speaking, the thumb and finger of his

right-hand had been inserted in his waistcoat pocket. They now brought out the Great Mogul Diamond (or its imitation) and dropped it gently into the skinny palm of the old lapidary. A low sigh which he could not repress told with what anxiety Captain Ducie awaited the verdict of Mr. Vermusen.

Grave and immovable as a judge, the diamond-dealer received the glittering gem in his palm. A moment he looked at it through his spectacles; then by a gentle up and down movement of his hand he seemed to be testing its weight as in comparison with its size. Then he fixed a small microscope in his eye and surveyed the facets carefully through it. Then he put it in his mouth and rolled his tongue round it three or four times. Lastly, he put it into a pair of tiny brass scales and weighed it. Then he looked up and spoke.

"Paste, sir—paste," was all he said.

There was a chair close by where Captain Ducie was standing. He sank into it, as it seemed without any volition on his part. For

a few moments he did not speak. Then he said very quietly: "You are quite sure that it is nothing more than paste?"

The old lapidary's thick white eyebrows went up in quiet disdain. "I am not in the habit, sir, of making assertions which I cannot maintain by proof," he said, drily. "With your permission, and by the aid of this little file, I will prove to you in a still more effectual way that I have stated nothing more than a simple fact."

"Thanks. No. I ask your pardon for seeming to doubt your word. I am satisfied." He paused, and Mr. Vermusen looked as if he thought the interview ought to end there. But presently Captain Ducie spoke again.

"I presume that you are a dealer in all sorts of gems, both real and factitious. Have you any objection to purchase this one of me at your own price?"

"Such a purchase would be of no use whatever to me. Your gem is too large for setting either as a genuine stone or an imitation one, and to

break it up would be to render it still more worthless than it is now. I must decline to purchase it at any price."

Captain Ducie put the glittering impostor back into his pocket. Then he rose, lifted his hat, bade Mr. Vermusen a courteous good-morning, and so quitted the shop without another word.

When he got into the street he hesitated for a moment or two which way he should turn. But all ways were now alike to him. Instinctively he took the road leading to the sea.

As he reached the bottom of the street a heavy broad-wheeled waggon laden with stone was on the point of turning the corner. A sudden impulse came into his mind, and he acted on it without giving himself time for a second thought. He took the Diamond out of his pocket, stooped down, and placed it full in the track of the waggon wheel. With indrawn breath and tense muscles he stood watching the ponderous wheel roll slowly forward. One more

turn, and the Diamond was hidden for ever. A faint crunching noise, a tiny heap of glittering dust, and all was over. With a sigh and a shrug of the shoulders, Captain Ducie went his way.

CHAPTER X.

HAUNTED.

For full three hours Captain Ducie wandered by the lonely shore. A train of wild and incoherent thoughts, like torn fragments of cloud in a windy sky, chased each other brokenly across his mind. One thought alone—to which all the rest were subsidiary—found a permanent resting-place in his mind, shutting in the horizon of his life on every side as with a sombre pall. It was the thought—or rather, the knowledge,—that he was irretrievably ruined.

In the common parlance of the world he had been "ruined" twice before. But on both those occasions he had had something to fall back upon: rich relations, powerful friends; a wind-

fall, on one occasion, from a wealthy aunt who happened to die just at the time when her cash was most needed; and under all, at the bottom of the casket, had lain youth and hope. But now! Well: his relations were hopelessly alienated; one by one his powerful friends had all turned their backs on him; his character, like an old piece of electro-plate, would have looked all the brighter for a little polishing: he was without money, without youth, without hope. Work he could not, and to beg he was ashamed. Such being the case, what was there left for him but to throw up the sponge, cry quits, and go under as soon as possible?

The clear bright morning had settled down into a raw drizzling day. Captain Ducie paced the sands for full three hours, heedless of the wet and cold. Then he went into the town and pawned his watch for ten sovereigns. Thence he wandered back to the hotel. He could not eat, but the power of drinking was still left him. He had a fire lighted in his bedroom, and ordered up a bottle of cognac. He was ill, not only men-

tally but bodily. He was suffering from the reaction consequent on the excitement of the last few days. But it was more than any common reaction, it was the dull dead apathy of one who sees himself hopelessly cut off from all that makes life worth the having. In addition to this, as the day went on, he began to suffer from the first symptoms of a sort of low fever brought on by the severe cold he had caught during his many hours' exposure on the cliffs while hunting down the mulatto. His head ached, his eyes throbbed, all his pulses seemed to be on fire. But to deaden the still more weary ache at his heart he kept on resorting every now and again to the bottle of cognac by his bedside. For he had gone to bed as soon as his fire was lighted, and there he lay all through the dreary afternoon and the still drearier evening, and till far into the night, tossing and turning from side to side, courting the sleep that would not come.

But it came to him at last. He had counted the weary chimes one after another till now midnight was here. In the act of counting the

twelve strokes as they were doled out slowly one by one from some near-at-hand church, he sank off quietly to sleep, and for a little while both head and heart were at rest.

He had slept for some two hours or more when suddenly he started up in bed with precisely the same sensation that had awakened him the night before—the sensation of a cold wet hand pressed heavily across his mouth and nostrils so as utterly to stop his breathing. As before, he woke up in the most extreme terror, and with great drops of agony on his brow. Instinctively he put out his tongue and passed it across his lips. Again he fancied that he could detect upon them the taste of sea-water. For him, that night, there was no more sleep.

The fever still held him like a burning vice. He lay tossing and groaning in its hot embrace, looking ever with impatient eyes for the dawn that was so long in coming. It came at last, as all things come in their turn. Then Captain Ducie rose, washed and dressed. Despite his illness, he was thoroughly bent on quitting the

island by that morning's boat. He hungered to be back in England, in London, among the busy haunts of men. The terrible Hand which had broken his sleep for two nights in succession would hardly follow him into the heart of London. There he would lie by till he was better mentally and bodily, and could afford to face the gloomy future with some degree of manly fortitude. He had known fellows as utterly bankrupt and ruined as he was, who had yet managed to survive their difficulties, seeming, indeed, to float none the less gaily along the stream of life, although they might not have a sovereign to call their own. He had relations rich and many, who had one and all declared that if he were begging his bread they would turn him empty from their doors; but now that the grim reality was so near, when begging his bread would soon be his only portion unless help were granted him by some one, they would surely concert together, and, were it only for the sake of the family credit, would arrange amongst themselves a life pittance for him, on which, in some quiet Continental nook where

there was good scenery and good society, he might vegetate not unpleasantly for the remainder of his days.

He went down to breakfast, but could not touch a morsel, although he had not tasted food since the day before yesterday. A close carriage took himself and his luggage to the steamer. The morning was cold, wet, and stormy, with a nasty cross sea. He was not displeased to find that very few passengers were going over. He wanted to be as much alone as possible. The fever that had parched him up all night had now been succeeded by a chill that made his teeth chatter, and caused him to tremble in every limb. He went below deck and lay down in a berth and got the steward to heap a lot of wraps about him, and to bring him some hot brandy, but for a long time he felt as if he should never be warm again. All his life he had been a good sailor, he never remembered having been sea-sick. But to-day the boat had hardly got clear of the harbour before he was attacked. By the time the steamer reached Guernsey he had little or no power of

volition left in him. He beckoned to his friend the steward. "Let me be put ashore here," he whispered. "I will wait for fairer weather before going on."

So he was carried ashore by three or four stalwart sailors, and deposited in a fly, and driven off to the hotel "Pomme d'Or." He was exceedingly ill, and he went off to bed at once. The people at the hotel wanted to have a doctor called in, but he would not hear of such a thing. It was only that confounded *mal-de-mer*, he said, and he should be better in the morning.

But he was not better in the morning. If anything, rather worse.

Again he was woke up in the middle of the night by feeling a wet hand laid across his mouth. This persistent disturbance of his sleep, together with the very want of sleep itself, was beginning to tell upon his nerves. When was the terrible persecution to end?

The sensation was so horrible as utterly to banish sleep for the time being, and again he lay tossing to and fro, waiting with impatient

eyes for the dawn. About eight he rose and made a show of eating some breakfast. After breakfast he sat in his easy-chair before the fire, and while thus sitting he felt a sweet drowsiness steal through all his limbs. It was broad daylight now, and with the darkness some portion of the fear inspired by the Hand had vanished. He could almost afford to smile at his fright of the last three nights. In any case, he let the drowsiness have its way, and so in three minutes more he was fast asleep before the fire.

But he had not been more than ten minutes asleep when he was disturbed in precisely the same way that he had been disturbed before. And, if his senses did not deceive him, he heard the echo of a low malignant laugh close at the back of his chair. He stared round half expecting to see he knew not what. But every nook and corner of the room was plainly visible. There was no one there but himself. He shuddered from head to foot, and sank back in his chair, and burst into tears.

To-day the weather was even stormier than yesterday: a higher wind, more rain. He was not hurried for time, and to cross either to Southampton or Weymouth in the condition in which he then was, would be sheer madness. He would have medical advice while thus laid up in ordinary at the "Pomme d'Or," and would get cured of his cold, and have an opium mixture to make him sleep, and would wait for fairer weather and a gentler sea before attempting to continue his voyage. If he could only recover the lost tone of his nerves, he felt thoroughly convinced that he should never more be haunted by that nightmare Hand.

Captain Ducie had always held the whole tribe of doctors in abhorrence. He had not been under the hands of one of the brotherhood for more than twenty years, and nothing could have been more strongly indicative of the state to which he was now reduced, than the fact of his determining of his own free will to call in medical advice. He was, in very truth, wretchedly ill, thoroughly woe-begone.

The doctor came, saw him, listened to what he had to say, and prescribed. Ducie entered into no details as to the mode in which his sleep was broken. He merely said that he was unable to get his proper rest in consequence of being so frequently troubled with nightmare, and he begged of the doctor to provide him with a powerful opiate. Medicine came: two bottles: one for the improvement of his cold, the second to be taken just before getting into bed.

Ducie spent a doleful day enough. He had no heart left to read either a newspaper or a magazine, and the very thought of a cigar turned him sick. This latter he regarded as a very bad sign. "When a fellow gets past his smoke, he's not of much account in this world," he said to himself with a sigh. Still, he did not fail to derive some grains of comfort from the hope that with the assistance of his friend the doctor he should succeed in cheating that terrible nightmare which seemed bent on slowly pressing his life out an inch at a time.

He waited with desperate patience without any further attempt at sleep till he heard the people below stairs shutting up the hotel for the night. Then he got into bed, and marking off, with his forefinger on the bottle, a dose and a half of the draught, he swallowed it more gratefully than he had ever swallowed the choicest wine, and then lay down.

Hardly, as it seemed to him, had his head touched the pillow before a delicious languor stole through all his limbs, and with a half turn over to the other side, he was gone.

He was gone, and in a deeper sleep, probably, than he had ever been in before. But it was a sleep that did not last above an hour. At the end of that time it was broken precisely as it had been broken before. Only, this time, as if on account of his being so soundly asleep and therefore more difficult to arouse, he seemed closer to the point of actual suffocation than he had been before. He gasped for breath, and gurgled in his throat, and the veins of his fore-

head stood out thick and blue as though the circulation were on the point of being violently stopped for ever. Again his returning senses seemed to catch the sound of a low mocking laugh, and again there was the taste of salt-water on his lips.

His terror this time on awaking was, if such a thing were possible, more extreme than it had ever been before, inasmuch as he felt that he had been closer to the verge of death. "Another half-minute, and I should have been gone past recovery," he said to himself as he wiped the great drops of agony off his brow. "Devil!" he muttered aloud—"yellow-skinned son of the bottomless pit, so this is your revenge, is it?" There was a sort of stony despair in his set colourless face, but a wild, almost insane defiance flashed from the hollow caverns of his eyes. "You may win the day, perhaps: I cannot help that," he cried. "But the victory shall be in my fashion—not in yours!"

From that moment he seemed to accept the fate which he saw looming before him as a fore-

gone conclusion from which it was impossible to escape.

Unconsciously to himself, perhaps, he was somewhat of a fatalist in his ideas: the maxim, that "What is to be, must be," was one that was often in his mind if seldom on his lips. He felt like one of those doomed beings whose tragic woes the Greek dramatists loved to sing; he was pursued by a shadowy Nemesis, from whose relentless grasp there was no escape. He could only bow his head in silence and submit.

He got out of bed and made himself some chocolate, and sat brooding over the fire for the remainder of the night.

Two or three times he fell off into a broken doze, which lasted for only a few minutes each time, and each time his brief slumber was broken by the menace rather than the reality of the terrible Hand.

The access of terror through which he had passed early in the night had the effect of rendering him comparatively callous to these minor

visitations. Still they all had their effect in helping to wear him out, both in body and mind.

After breakfast—which with him was a mere pretence of a meal—he ordered up pens, ink, and paper, and sat down to write.

With a few intervals of rest he kept on writing through the day, and did not finish till an hour after candles had been brought up. He put what he had written into two different envelopes, which he sealed up and addressed. Then he burned several old letters which lay at the bottom of his despatch box, and, lastly, he took a long, brown, silky ringlet, which he had not looked at for years, from its resting-place in a tiny satin-lined case, and after pressing it passionately two or three times to his lips, he dropped that too into the fire. After that he sat for a full hour gazing with sorrowful eyes into the smouldering embers without stirring a limb.

The doctor had called about noon, whereupon Ducie had assured him that he had passed an excellent night, and felt himself very much better than on the previous day.

The medico looked rather dubious, but could not get over his patient's assurances that he was rapidly improving. Indeed, to-night, after he rose from his seat by the fire and began to pace his room, there was a brightness in his eyes, and an amount of energy in his manner, that might have deceived an inexperienced person into thinking that the morrow would find him perfectly recovered.

A little later on he took a bath and perfumed himself, and ordered up a choice supper, of which he partook with more appetite than he had shown for several days past. Then he began to prepare for bed.

But before retiring for the night, he dived deep into his portmanteau and fished up from its depths a long, thin Damascus dagger of blue steel, with an inlaid haft. He wiped it carefully and felt its point, smiling cynically the while, and then he laid it on the little table by his bedside.

He was soon asleep, but only to be awakened a couple of hours later, as he had been awakened

before, by the pressure of a cold wet Hand across his mouth and nostrils, and by feeling that he was on the verge of suffocation. It took him two or three minutes to recover his equanimity. Then he got out of bed, put on his dressing-gown, lighted the candles, and wheeled an easy-chair up to the fire.

The wind was roaring down the chimneys of the hotel and shaking the windows, and he could hear the heavy dashing of the sea against the granite walls of the pier.

A wild, eerie night—a night on which the spirits of the dead might easily be supposed to come forth and wander round the places they had loved best on earth.

Captain Ducie drew the little table close up to his easy-chair, and then sat down before the fire and rested his feet on the fender. On the table were a bottle of cognac, a wine-glass, and the "bare bodkin" with the inlaid haft.

* * * * * *

It may be recollected that after George Strickland obtained Captain Ducie's address from the porter at the Piebalds Club, he telegraphed to Major Strickland at Tydsbury. The reply to his message was a request that he would proceed to Jersey without delay, and there, if possible, bring his search to a definite conclusion.

On reaching St. Helier, he went at once to the "Royal George," and inquired for Captain Ducie. In reply he was told that Captain Ducie had left by the Southampton boat four days previously. George was excessively chagrined, for he had quite made up his mind that he should find Ducie at St. Helier. All that he could now do was to go back to London and there wait till a fresh address should be sent by Ducie to the Piebalds, and then follow him up from that point. So he stayed that night at the "Royal George," and started for England by next morning's steamer.

He was standing on the bridge of the steamer, gazing on what looked like a bank of cloud in the distance, but which someone had told him

was Guernsey, when the captain and one of the passengers came up and halted close by him. They were talking earnestly together, and George heard the name of Captain Ducie twice mentioned by the captain. He moved away out of earshot till the two men separated. Then he went up to the captain. "I accidentally heard you mention the name of Captain Ducie," he said. "May I ask whether you are acquainted with that gentleman, and whether you can tell me his present address?"

"I am not acquainted with the gentleman in question," said the captain, "but I can tell you his present address. If you choose to inquire at the 'Pomme d'Or,' in St. Peter's, you will find him lying there, stark dead, stabbed to the heart by his own hand."

George was inexpressibly shocked. In answer to his question, the captain supplied him with these further particulars: Ducie had been stopping at the "Pomme d'Or" for the last two or three days, very much out of health. He had been seen by a doctor, who had pronounced him

to be suffering from a species of low fever, brought on through having contracted a severe cold; his nerves, too, seemed to be very much shaken and out of order. There seemed nothing, however, but what a few days' rest, with due attention to the doctor's prescriptions, would have set right. Yesterday morning, on being called, there was no answer, and on the door being forced, Ducie was found dead, having evidently stabbed himself some time in the night with a small dagger that was found on the ground not far away.

George landed at Guernsey, and hurried up to the "Pomme d'Or," where every particular which the captain had given him was confirmed. It was clearly proved that the act must have been premeditated, seeing that the uppermost thing in the dead man's writing-desk was a slip of paper, on which was written a request that in case of anything happening to himself his cousin, the Honourable Egerton Dacre, should at once be communicated with. This request had been complied with before George reached the hotel,

so he made up his mind to await the arrival of Mr. Dacre, and detail to him the circumstances which had led to his taking such an interest in the fate of Captain Ducie.

The Hon. Mr. Dacre arrived in due course, and after the funeral was over George introduced himself, and told his story. "It is just the sort of thing Ned would be likely to do," said Mr. Dacre; "to contract a secret marriage, and afterwards to separate from his wife. I am, however, pleased to find that the lady to whom he gave his name came of so excellent a family. As regards his daughter, I know of no reason why she should not be received as such by all of us. I am sure my mother will be delighted to find that Ned has left a child whom she may acknowledge without a blush. Of course you are aware that Ducie has died as poor as a rat, so that in the way of worldly goods the young lady must not expect anything from our side of the house, unless she be in want of a home, in which case we will gladly welcome her. I must, however, lay the whole case before Ned's elder brother, with

whom, as being the head of that branch of the family, the settlement of all future details must rest."

Such were the tidings that Captain George Strickland took back with him to Tydsbury.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE DIAMOND AT DUPLEY WALLS.

Mr. Solomon Madgin had not failed to inform Lady Pollexfen from time to time of the progress that was being made in the attempt to recover the Great Mogul Diamond. This he had done without entering into any minute details of the case, of which, indeed, her ladyship cared to hear nothing. It was enough for her to be told every few days that Mr. Madgin still held the clue in his fingers, and that each step which he took would, to the best of his belief, bring him so much nearer the object the attainment of which they both had so deeply at heart.

Lady Pollexfen had of course been apprised that Mr. Madgin's presence in Jersey was

needed for the furtherance of their scheme; but when he had been gone a week and no news of any kind had been received from him, she began to grow not only impatient, but uneasy lest Mr. Madgin should in any way have come to grief. She could neither eat nor sleep as she was wont to do, but wandered aimlessly up and down the great empty rooms at Dupley Walls, leaning on Janet's arm, and either muttering to herself about people who had long been dead, or complaining querulously that Mr. Madgin, the man whom she had trusted above all others, had also failed her in her time of need.

To Janet that was indeed a season of heart-weariness. She had not had time to recover from the crushing blow which her mother's death had inflicted upon her. Many a time she woke up in the night and found herself in tears, for not even in sleep could she forget the loss of her whom she had learned to love so dearly, while still ignorant of the tie that bound them so closely together.

With nerves unstrung, and a heart that was ill at ease, it is not to be wondered at that even from the very quest which George Strickland had gone upon her mind seemed to draw in and gather to itself certain premonitions, vague and faint, of further unhappiness to come. She longed for and yet dreaded the coming of each post. Major Strickland sometimes wrote to her, and any morsel of news was precious to her that had any reference, however remote, to Captain George. And yet she never opened one of the major's notes without trembling lest it might contain some news of a hitherto unknown father who might, perchance, come and claim her, and take her away for ever from a spot which her mother's memory made sacred to her, and from those faithful friends to whom her young affections clung so tenaciously.

Janet's life at Dupley Walls was one of which few people would have envied her. From the date of Sister Agnes's death, Lady Pollexfen had grown more exacting in her requirements, more capricious in her moods, more difficult to

please than she had ever been before. There was a terrible wakefulness about her. What sleep she had was intermittent and of short duration; and Janet herself never got to bed without being wearied out both in body and spirit with her long attendance on the strange old woman. Often, when she had not been asleep more than a couple of hours, Lady Pollexfen's bell would ring violently, and then Janet had to rise and dress herself and hasten to the old woman's room, to find that she was wanted to read aloud, or, it might be, to play écarté, while her ladyship sat up in bed with a gay Indian shawl thrown round her shoulders, her withered face bent keenly over her cards, and an occasional hollow chuckle issuing from her lips. At the end of a couple of hours or so she would go off to sleep almost as suddenly as if she were an automaton whose eyes were made to shut at the touch of a spring. Then Janet would creep back shivering to bed, only to begin another day's dreary round a few hours later.

During the last few weeks Lady Pollexfen had seemed as if she could scarcely bear to let Janet out of her sight. Not that she was in any way more affectionate towards her than she had ever been. Her manner was still as hard, her tongue was still as caustic as of old. But she seemed now as if she could not bear to be alone: as if constant companionship with Janet's fresh and sweet young nature were needed to keep alive the slowly decaying embers of her life. Be that as it may, Janet's time was so fully occupied that it was all she could do to steal one short hour out of the twenty-four for a solitary ramble in the park: but without such a walk she felt that she should soon have broken down under the exactions of her life at Dupley Walls. A visit to Major Strickland at Tydsbury was now entirely out of the question. As already stated, the post now and then brought her a brief note from him. As the tenor of these notes was invariably affectionate and reassuring, they were cherished by her as the chiefest grains of comfort by which the

dreary passage of time was brightened at Dupley Walls.

As previous chapters have already told us, George Strickland was still busy with his quest at the very time that Mr. Madgin was on his way back to Dupley Walls with the Great Mogul Diamond in his possession. Consequently, Captain Ducie was still among the living, and George Strickland had not yet left London in search of him, when on a certain morning a telegram sent by Mr. Madgin from Southampton was brought to Lady Pollexfen. It was brief and to the purpose :—

"Thoroughly successful. The Great Mogul is travelling with me. His Highness will reach Dupley Walls to-morrow."

Lady Pollexfen was sitting up in bed drinking her chocolate when the message was taken in to her. She requested Janet to read it aloud. The cup and saucer dropped from her fingers as Janet read. She turned quite white and faint,

and for a minute or two was unable to speak. After smelling awhile at her salts she revived, and asked Janet to read the message a second time.

"That good Madgin!" she exclaimed. "What a thing it is to be served faithfully!" Then turning to Janet: "See, child, what can be accomplished by intelligence and perseverance!" she cried. "When Sergeant Nicholas came here and told his story, how hopeless it seemed to expect that my poor boy's Diamond would ever be recovered for me: and yet, behold, it is here, and the wicked are brought to confusion!"

During the whole of that day her ladyship was very much elated, and correspondingly gracious and good-tempered towards Janet. In the afternoon they drove to Tydsbury, and there her ladyship was pleased to buy a set of bog-oak ornaments for Miss Holme: an almost unprecedented piece of liberality on the part of the mistress of Dupley Walls.

Late the same night came a message from Mr.

Madgin stating that he should be at Dupley Walls at ten o'clock the following morning.

By that hour next morning her ladyship was up and dressed, ready to receive company. Had Lady Pollexfen been going to a dinner party at Langley Castle she could not have been got up more elaborately than she was on the present occasion. Her choicest coiffure, her stiffest silk, her most ancient lace, her largest diamonds, together with an extra streak of rouge and an extra touch of the powder-puff, had all been employed to dignify and render memorable the approaching ceremonial. Her ladyship was too much excited to partake of breakfast, but when everything was ready she called for a small glass of curaçoa and cream, and then taking Janet's arm, and supported on the other side by her gold-headed malacca, she descended the shallow staircase with slow and stately steps, and reached the great hall just as the clocks were striking ten.

She knew that Mr. Madgin was punctuality itself. She had reached the centre of the hall

as the clocks ceased striking, and the same instant there was a loud knocking at the grand entrance. Mr. Madgin's fine instinct had told him that on this occasien, if never again, he must enter Dupley Walls as if he were a visitor of state, and not by the modest side-door through which his entrances and exits had heretofore been made. One of the two faded servitors in faded livery whom Lady Pollexfen still retained flung wide the door. Mr. Madgin in his Sunday suit of black, with white neckcloth and gold-rimmed eyeglass dangling across his waistcoat, advanced slowly into the hall, removed his hat and bowed profoundly. Lady Pollexfen, on her side, made her most stately and elaborate curtsey. Mr. Madgin came forward; Lady Pollexfen advanced a step or two and held out her hand. Mr. Madgin carried the lean and ancient fingers respectfully to his lips.

"I return from fulfilling your ladyship's behests," he said. "I also bring with me a trifling memento of my journey, of which I humbly request your ladyship's acceptance."

Speaking thus Mr. Madgin produced from one of his pockets a tiny casket of imitation Byzantine workmanship which he had bought while passing through London. Touching a spring, the lid flew open, and there, on a cushion of white satin, lay the glittering source of so many hopes and fears, of so much happiness and misery—the Great Mogul Diamond.

For a moment or two Lady Pollexfen stood perfectly still, eyeing the glittering bauble, without speaking. Breathing a little faster than she was wont, she at length put forth a trembling hand and received the casket and its contents from Mr. Madgin.

"Follow me," she said in a voice that was shaken by emotion. Then she turned, and discarding for once the assistance of Janet's arm, and carrying the open casket before her, she began to retrace her way slowly and painfully towards her own apartments. Miss Holme and Mr. Madgin followed at a respectful distance.

On reaching her private sitting-room Lady Pollexfen sat down in her high-backed chair of

carved oak, and motioned to Mr. Madgin first to shut the door, and next to take a seat.

"Mr. Madgin," said her ladyship after a few moments, "any formula of thanks which I could put into words would be totally inadequate to express my feelings towards you for the great service you have just done me. I can only say that you are no longer my servant but my friend."

"Madam, I am overwhelmed by the honour you have just conferred upon me," answered Mr. Madgin, as he rose, laid his hand on his heart and bowed. "Such a recognition of my humble merits is far beyond my deserts."

"Mr. Madgin," resumed Lady Pollexfen in her most stately manner, "if you will honour me by accepting my friendship, it is yours."

"Too much honour, really," murmured Mr. Madgin in a distressed voice.

Lady Pollexfen waved her arm, as if that portion of the subject were beyond the pale of further discussion. "At the same time, Mr. Madgin," she resumed, "you must not for one

moment imagine that I wish you to forego the least portion of that pecuniary reward which was promised you when you first took in hand the remarkable inquiry which you have this day brought to such a successful issue. I have here, ready made out and signed, a cheque for the sum agreed on. I am quite aware that to a man of your noble and disinterested character the mere pecuniary part of the affair will seem of small account in comparison with that other gift which I have just conferred upon you."

Mr. Madgin's face had brightened wonderfully during the last minute or two. With his hand he mechanically smoothed the gray hair across his forehead before he answered. "What a remarkable knowledge of character your ladyship displays," he said deferentially. "How well you understand the disposition of Solomon Madgin. Money does indeed seem dross when weighed against the golden gift of friendship." He coughed slightly behind his hand, and looked a little anxiously at her ladyship.

"Take the cheque, Mr. Madgin," she said

as she handed him the magic slip of paper. "You must come and dine with me to-morrow. At the same time bring me an account of the expenses incurred by you over this affair, and a second cheque shall at once be given you for the amount."

Mr. Madgin was nearly overcome, and could only murmur a few indistinct words in reply.

"Perchance, Solomon Madgin, you look upon me as nothing better than a mercenary old woman." Mr. Madgin vehemently disclaimed any such idea. "But I tell you," resumed Lady Pollexfen, with emphasis, "that I value this magnificent gem less, infinitely less, for its pecuniary value, than because I know it to be a true and veritable relic of my dear dead son. His fingers have held it; his eyes have looked on it; it was in his keeping when he died; it was his parting gift to me, his mother, who held him in her heart of hearts as dearer to her than all else the world could offer. In that fact lay the root of my strong desire to possess this stone. And now that I have it I can hold

it but for a little while. Soon the day will come, when—— But why pursue the dreary suggestion any further? Enough for the day is the evil thereof. Let the morrow take care of itself. And now, again thanks, and then good morning. To-morrow you will dine with me."

"One word before I go," said Mr. Madgin as he rose. "May I venture to express a hope that it is not your ladyship's intention to retain so valuable a gem in your personal possession? Think of the risk you run of its being lost or stolen. Let me entreat you, that without any unnecessary delay your ladyship will give it into the custody either of your banker, or of some other person who has the means and the will to keep it safely."

"There is sense in what you say, Solomon Madgin, but I cannot persuade myself to part from my dear boy's relic almost as soon as it has come into my hands. For the present I shall certainly retain it in my own custody. I will take very good care not to lose it, and as

for its being stolen, there is no one save yourself and Miss Holme who knows that I have such an article in my possession. And I think I can trust both of you to keep my secret."

Mr. Madgin saw that it would be impolitic to urge the point any further at present; so, after bidding her ladyship a respectful farewell, he withdrew without further remark.

CHAPTER XII.

DE MORTUIS NIL NISI BONUM.

Lady Pollexfen was obliged to go to bed almost immediately after the departure of Mr. Madgin from Dupley Walls. Now that the long-coveted gem was in her possession, the excitement that had upheld her during the ardour of pursuit at once died out, leaving her utterly prostrate and to all appearance half-a-dozen years older than when she rose in the morning. The reaction was too much for her enfeebled health, and she lay in bed all that day and all the following day, speaking little to any one, but often talking disconnectedly to herself, and seeming sometimes as though she were addressing imaginary persons by her bedside. During the whole of this time she held the Diamond, now in one hand,

now in the other, often gazing at it, sometimes kissing it and talking to it as though it could understand everything she said.

But whatever might be the mental hallucinations of Lady Pollexfen at this time, her perception of the real events that were happening round her, and her criticism of those in attendance on her, were in no degree impaired. She had never exacted more attention from Miss Holme: had never been more difficult to please. She would not allow her invitation to Mr. Madgin to be countermanded. That gentleman, accordingly, dined in solitary state in the great saloon, waited on by the solemn butler, and treated in every respect as a guest of distinction. Her ladyship sent down her compliments by Miss Holme, with an expression of regret at her inability to join Mr. Madgin at table. The next day she was somewhat better, and the day following that she was up and about again, wandering restlessly to and fro through the stately but silent rooms, or on to the warm south terrace for a few minutes in the middle of

the day. But it seemed to Janet that the old woman's arm rested more heavily on hers than it was wont to do, that she walked more slowly, and had to halt more frequently to rest. That strange wakefulness which would not allow her to sleep except by fits and starts, was still upon her. She had caused Janet's bed to be removed into a corner of her own large room, so that Janet might be more immediately within call. Many were the nights that Janet never got into bed at all, but had to satisfy herself with flying snatches of sleep in a large armchair by her ladyship's bedside. Sometimes Lady Pollexfen would lie awake for two or three hours in the middle of the night with wide-open eyes fixed solemnly on the canopy over her head, requiring no attendance, and never speaking except when she perceived signs of drowsiness in Janet, who was stationed where she could be seen by a mere turn of the eyes. Then would her ladyship's voice ring out clear and sharp: "Miss Holme! Miss Holme! the devil is behind you, about to cut off your hair with a pair of shears." Or

perhaps, "Miss Holme! Miss Holme! there is a large grey rat staring at you out of the corner. Do make haste and frighten him away."

Janet had neither seen nor heard anything of Major Strickland for more than a week. Her fears were beginning to overmaster her. She had a prevision that there was ill news in store for her. Would the errand on which George Strickland was gone bring her happiness or misery? was the question which she was continually putting to herself. Had she a father alive? and if alive, would he prove to be a friend —a protector? Or, would he prove to be one whom she could neither love nor reverence?—one who by his conduct to her mother had shown of what falsehood and treachery his heart was compact? Hard and dreary as was her life at Dupley Walls since the death of Sister Agnes, it was still redeemed by occasional flying gleams of sunshine—sunshine which left some portion of its warmth in her heart after its brightness had passed away. What she dreaded was that George Strickland's quest might so result as to

deprive her of even this consolation; that it might result in proving her to be the daughter of some ruined and disgraced man who would claim her as his own, and sever with a merciless hand all those sweet tendrils of love and friendship from which her heart's sole nourishment was derived. At length the suspense grew intolerable. She wrote and despatched a brief note to Major Strickland, begging earnestly for news of some kind. This note crossed the major on the road, who was on his way that very morning to Dupley Walls with the view of telling Janet the news, or such portions of it as he might deem advisable, with which his nephew had reached home over night.

So jealous and exacting had Lady Pollexfen become of late, that the major could not go boldly into the house and ask to see Miss Holme. To have done so would have entirely defeated the object of his visit, and would have simply resulted in making Janet for the time being a closer prisoner than ever. But the major was diplomatic. Making his way through

the side entrance to Dolly Dance's room, he contrived to get a whispered message delivered to Miss Holme; but even then he had to wait upwards of two hours before Janet could steal away for a few minutes to listen to what he had to say.

The story which George Strickland had to tell after his return from Jersey was a far more surprising one than the major had expected to hear. Many of its details were of too painful a nature ever to be communicated to Janet.

How could it benefit any one to tell the dead man's daughter that her father had been a gambler and a roué, and that he had ended a disgraceful career by committing suicide? Why pain a tender heart by such details? It would be pained sufficiently to know that the father it had hoped to find had only been found when it was too late for him to look upon his daughter in this world—too late even to know that there was a creature so near akin to him in existence. Therefore, as he walked slowly through the park on his way to Dupley Walls, the major conned

over and over the story he had made up his mind to tell, and it was a story which he needed to repeat many times to himself before telling it aloud, for the old soldier was a bad hand at concealments of any kind.

Janet's tears came the moment she set eyes on Major Strickland. She was worn out with anxiety and the long vigils she had had to keep of late. The major drew her towards him and kissed her tenderly on the forehead. Then her sobs came unrestrainedly, and for a little while she could not give utterance to a word. The major placed her in a chair and sat down beside her, and gazed at her with anxious eyes, rubbing one of her hands tenderly between his own withered palms, till Janet had in some degree recovered her serenity.

"George reached home last night from his journey," the major ventured to say at last.

Janet's heart began to beat hurriedly. She looked up into the major's eyes, and read something there that turned her cheek even paler than it was before.

"You have some bad news to tell me," she said in a low voice, while her hand squeezed that of the major tightly.

"My poor child! you have neither a mother nor a father," said the major, with a returning pressure of the hand.

Janet sighed.

"I am no poorer off than I imagined myself to be," she said quietly.

"I have not told you all. Unknown to you, unknown to your mother, your father has been alive all these years. He was living at the time your mother died, and had not our search for him been delayed so long after that event, he would have learnt that he had a daughter grown up to woman's estate whom he had never seen, and who had never seen him. But when George found him he was deaf to all earthly sounds. Poverina mia, your father died nine days ago."

On Janet's face, as the major said those words, came a look of pain and bewilderment pitiful to see.

"Poor, poor papa!" she murmured. "Only two short weeks ago, and I might have seen him and spoken to him, and have told him how dearly I would love him. If we had but known! If we had but known!"

She was crying quietly and pitifully by this time, in a way that made the old soldier's heart ache to witness.

"Great heaven! what a treasure that man missed when he missed the love of this dear child," said the major to himself.

"You must please tell me all about it," said Janet after a little while. "What you have just stated seems so utterly strange to me, that at present I can hardly realize the fact that I have not really been the fatherless girl I have all along believed myself to be. Ah! dear Major Strickland, how much I owe to you and other kind friends! Had it not been for your efforts in my behalf, I should never have known what you have told me to-day."

"It would perhaps have been as well for your peace of mind if you never had known it."

"Indeed, dear Major Strickland, you must not say that. The truth can never injure us. But now you will tell me, will you not, all that you know or have heard respecting this father whom I shall never see on earth?"

But it was not the major's intention to tell Janet all that he knew respecting Captain Ducie. The story he did tell her was a mild version of the one that had been told him.

He could not conceal from her the fact that Captain Ducie had purposely abandoned his wife, nor that he had led her to believe that he had been drowned in order that the tie between them might be more completely severed. But he softened both circumstances in the telling, and made as many excuses for the dead man as if he had been a brother of his own.

On Captain Ducie's after-career he dwelt lightly and tenderly, contriving to leave on Janet's mind the impression that her father had been more sinned against than sinning.

Finally, he altogether suppressed the fact of Ducie's suicide, and left Janet to suppose, that

although her father's death had been a sudden one, it had proceeded from causes that were natural and entirely beyond his own control. What information he had gathered respecting Captain Ducie's relatives and connexions he left to be told at some future time.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEPARTURE OF SIR JOHN POLLEXFEN.

But now the day was drawing near which had been fixed by Sir John Pollexfen in his will as that on which his body should be committed to the vault where the bones of several generations of his ancestors already reposed. Sir John would soon have been dead twenty years. On the twentieth anniversary of his decease, his body would leave Dupley Walls for ever.

That this day had long been looked forward to by Lady Pollexfen, Janet was well aware.

The fierce old woman had often declared that not till the dead body of her husband should be removed from Dupley Walls, would the curse that had rested on the house from the day of his

death be lifted off it, and rendered powerless for further harm.

In one of the galleries was a portrait of Sir John, which during the last twelve months had been visited daily by Lady Pollexfen. Every time she visited it, she made a practice of sticking a pin through some part of the figure, and leaving it there.

"One day less, Sir John, before the worms claim you as their own," was her usual remark on these occasions.

And then she would nod her head and jeer at the painted semblance of her dead husband.

"We shall have quite a little jubilee the day you leave us, by which you may judge how grieved we shall be to part from you. Another pin. Oh! that you could feel them, and that I could thus repay you in part for some of the thousands of heart-aches you caused me when you were alive!"

After she began to recover from the state of mental and bodily prostration into which she had sunk when no longer sustained by the ex-

citement consequent on the search for the Diamond, she was not long before she was about again, apparently as well and strong as she had been for the last year or two. But to Janet it seemed that much of her strength was factitious, and that it did not arise from any real improvement in her health, but rather from the necessity which seemed to sit so heavily upon her of being up and doing on the day of Sir John's departure. To be lying weak and ill in bed on such a day would have seemed like an acknowledgment of regret for the departure of her husband to which her proud spirit could by no means submit.

She spoke nothing but the truth when she said that she so thoroughly detested the memory of the man, that it would be a day of jubilee for her when his body was borne out of her sight for ever.

She was probably influenced in her determination by another reason, but one which she would have been slow to acknowledge even to herself.

Her mind was powerfully impressed with the

idea, that not only was the lifeless body of her husband under the roof of Dupley Walls, but that the house was haunted by his incorporeal presence; that, in fact, his spirit was doomed to wander unrestingly in and about the old house so long as his body—in accordance with his own foolish wish—remained unburied and unsanctified by the rites of Christian sepulture.

Hence the strange habit into which she had fallen of addressing her husband as though he were standing, an invisible presence, close by her elbow, and was cognizant of all she said.

It could not be other than a source of satisfaction to Janet to know that her midnight visits to the Black Room were so soon to come to an end. The duty she had there to perform was one which not even the custom of years could have rendered otherwise than distasteful to her. She never could quite conquer the superstitious thrill which touched her from head to foot every time she opened the door of the dreaded room. She never could quite get over the feeling that an unseen pair of eyes was watching her from

behind the funereal drapery that clothed the walls. She could never descend the stairs on her way back to the habitable regions of the house without a nervous shiver at the thought that perhaps some shadowy hand was being put forth to clutch her from behind, Janet could not, therefore, be otherwise than pleased to think that the silent tenant of Dupley Walls would so soon have to find another and a more permanent home.

Lady Pollexfen had named the date a month beforehand which was fixed for the removal of Sir John.

At length the last midnight arrived. Janet had been reading to her ladyship, and when the clock pointed to five minutes to twelve she shut the book and rose to go.

"I will go with you to-night," said her ladyship, who to all appearance had been dozing for the last half hour, although Janet had not on that account been allowed to lay down her book.

So arm-in-arm the two went slowly up the long staircases with many a halt to gather breath. At length the door of the Black Room was reached

and opened. Preceded by her ladyship Janet went in. While she went about her customary duty, Lady Pollexfen stood sternly erect, resting her crossed hands on the head of her cane, and gazing with hard unmoved countenance on the coffin of her dead husband.

Janet in her twilight walk through the garden a few hours previously had found a couple of late roses. These she had plucked and had fastened them into the bosom of her dress: she now took them out of her dress, and laid them reverently on the coffin.

"What are you about, child?" cried Lady Pollexfen in her most imperious tones. "Flowers are not for such as he. Take them away. For him you should bring the deadly nightshade and hemlock, and all plants that are hurtful to human life. There are some men, child, that, like the fatal upas tree, have power to blight and poison all who come within their influence. Such a man was he who is nailed up in that box. He blighted my life; he poisoned my son's life, and drove him abroad to die in a strange land; he withered

the lives of my two daughters, and not content with the evil which he did while living, he left his dead body as a curse that should haunt my life for twenty wretched years. That term is now at an end, and after to-morrow I shall grow twenty years younger, feeling and knowing that neither in time nor in eternity will his baneful presence ever haunt me again."

Suddenly she clutched Janet by the arm, and drew the girl closer to her. "He is there!" she said—"there, behind the black curtains, watching me, listening to every word that I say —as he used to watch and listen when he was alive. There is the same meanness, the same low trickery about him now that he is dead that marked him when he was living. He often visits me—often talks to me—and although he will not acknowledge it, I know that when once his body shall be laid in the vault at Dene Folly, I shall have seen and spoken with him for the last time. To-night, child, you must sit by my bedside all night long, and read aloud from some godly book. Then he will have no power to come near me or

harm me. But you must not go to sleep nor cease your reading till you see the first streaks of daylight in the east: after that we are safe. I said he was there. See how yonder curtain stirs and flutters. He will not show himself because you are here. It is only I, I who was his miserable wife for twenty-three long years, that he cares to torment. But come. Let us tarry here no longer. This is his last night, thank heaven! beneath the roof of Dupley Walls."

They went downstairs together as they had come, arm-in-arm, her ladyship shaking her head and mumbling to herself all the way as she went. Then she got into bed, and Janet sat by her side all night, reading aloud from a "godly book," while the old woman lay without stirring, with wide-staring solemn eyes that seemed to be gazing on some far-away picture, the subject of which was known to herself alone.

To Mr. Madgin was entrusted the charge of conveying the body of Sir John Pollexfen to its final resting-place at Dene Folly, forty miles

away; and Mr. Madgin was to be the sole "mourner" on the occasion. So Lady Pollexfen willed it. The body was to leave Dupley Walls at midnight, and be conveyed to the nearest railway station. After a journey of thirty miles by rail it would be met by another hearse and mourning-coach by means of which the third and last stage of the journey would be accomplished.

At a quarter to twelve precisely a hearse and mourning-coach drew up before the main entrance to Dupley Walls. The door was thrown open, and Mr. Madgin—solemn, dignified—glided in, followed by a number of familiars in black. Still led by Mr. Madgin, they trooped up the grand staircase like so many birds of evil omen hastening to some unholy feast. Not long were they away. Presently they reappeared, carrying on their shoulders the burden for which they had come. Slowly and carefully they descended the stairs, and were just crossing the hall on their way out, when an imperious voice commanded them to halt.

There, in the opposite gallery, stood the weird figure of Lady Pollexfen, her palsied head working awfully, her skinny hands trembling with nervous excitement, and the gems on her fingers scintillating in the lamplight. She was attired in her bridal dress of white satin and lace—a dress which she had not worn for forty-three years. Her black wig was gaily trimmed with flowers and scraps of lace, and in one hand she carried a large bouquet. A foot or two behind her stood Miss Holme.

She had commanded the bearers to halt, and they now stood gazing with wonder on this strange apparition. "In that shell lies the body of my husband, Sir John Pollexfen," she began, speaking in clear high-bred tones that could be plainly heard by everyone there. "He died twenty years ago this very day. When he died, there was not even one eye to weep for him, or one heart to mourn for him. All who had known him were glad that they should never see him more. By a most unholy will he devised that his body should be kept unburied for the

space of twenty years, and that under whatever roof I might choose to reside he also should there find a resting-place for the time being; the dead and the living were, in fact, to keep each other company all that time. Should I fail in carrying out his commands, the whole of the property left thus conditionally to me, was to pass away to others. I have carried out his commands; but here, to-night, in presence of you strangers, and with my eyes fixed for the last time on that coffin, I say to you, deliberately and solemnly: Would that I had never been born rather than have married that man! Would that I had died on my wedding-day rather than have had children to call him father! Would that I had died on the day that he died rather than have undertaken the burden which his wicked commands laid on my shoulders! I hate myself because I bear his name. I hate this house because it has sheltered him. Take his wretched body away out of my sight for ever!"

The procession moved slowly forward across

the hall, and out through the great door. A minute or two later, and hearse and coach set out on their midnight journey through the park. Then the great door was shut and locked by the solemn butler; and the same moment Lady Pollexfen staggered, and would have fallen to the ground had not Janet sprung forward in time to catch her as she fell.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TARN OF BEN DULAS.

Lady Pollexfen recovered sooner than might have been expected from the fainting fit into which she had fallen just as the hearse containing the body of Sir John Pollexfen moved away from Dupley Walls. She was very wakeful and restless all night, talking much, sometimes to Janet, sometimes to herself. Soon after daybreak she turned suddenly to Janet.

"I have decided to travel," she said. "A change will do me good. I have been confined to Dupley Walls for so many years that I almost forget what the outside world is like. This Indian summer will last a few days longer, and we will take advantage of it. We will go, in the first place, to North Wales, which I have

not visited since I was eighteen. As soon as we are tired of Wales we will set out for London, and after a few days there we will take wing for the South of France and there winter. Yes, we will start at once,—this very day. Order my boxes to be packed, and ascertain at what hour this afternoon there is a train that stops at Tydsbury by which we can get on to Chester."

"If your ladyship will allow me to make a suggestion," said Janet.

"I will not allow anything of the kind," answered Lady Pollexfen.

"Considering the state of your ladyship's health, I think it highly advisable that you see Dr. Jones and obtain his sanction before undertaking so arduous a journey."

"And pray, Mademoiselle Coasseuse, who gave you power to dictate under this roof? It is mine to command, and yours to obey. Carry out the instructions I have given you, and trouble yourself not at all about my health, which was never better than it is this morning."

That night Lady Pollexfen and Miss Holme

slept at Chester. Next morning they took train for Bangor, at which place they designed to stay for a few days.

Lady Pollexfen's opinion that a change of air would prove beneficial to her seemed to be borne out by the result. It was almost as if she had taken a fresh lease of life. Her appetite improved, her strength increased, her vivacity was unfailing. Day and night Janet was her constant attendant. Had not Janet's constitution been of the best, and had she not been full of energy and spirit, she must have broken down under the ordeal which at this time she had to undergo. Besides having the entire personal charge of Lady Pollexfen, the whole of the travelling arrangements (they had three servants with them) were under her supervision and control. Each evening she had to furnish her ladyship with a detailed account of the day's expenditure, and had to be admonished that this charge was excessive, or that one unnecessary, and be querulously scolded if the dinner happened to be bad, or the beds uncomfortable; or be asked to explain why she,

Lady Pollexfen, had been dragged to the "Crown Hotel," when anyone with an atom of common sense might have seen that the "Red Lion" over the way would have been both more economical and more comfortable to stay at. Later on came the long weary readings aloud—readings which were often prolonged till far into the small hours.

To Janet's surprise — although one could hardly be surprised at anything so eccentric a person might choose to do—Lady Pollexfen brought the Great Mogul Diamond with her on her travels. It was a most injudicious thing to do, and much of Janet's time and attention were taken up in seeing that her ladyship neither lost the precious gem nor had it stolen from her. This was a duty that came in a little while to weigh so heavily on Janet that she could not get her thoughts away from the Diamond even when asleep, but would start up in bed fancying she heard stealthy footsteps crossing the floor, or that someone outside was trying the door of her ladyship's room.

In the daytime Lady Pollexfen carelessly carried the Diamond in a small leather satchel that she wore buckled round her waist. At night it was either laid under her pillow, or else held tightly in her hand while she slept. Once or twice Janet ventured gently to expostulate, but was immediately silenced, and told to keep her observations to herself for the future.

As Lady Pollexfen told Janet, she had not been in North Wales since she was eighteen years old. Now that she had come back to it in her old age her intention was to revisit each scene that was hallowed in her memory as having been in some way connected with her first visit.

What it was that made this first visit to Wales one of the happiest recollections of an unhappy life, Janet could not quite make out; but that the recollection was a happy one there could be no doubt. Lady Pollexfen said nothing directly to Janet which would throw any light on the point; but she was continually muttering to

herself, with a happy smile on her face, and mentioning the names of the places they had visited, or were about to visit, in connexion with the names of people that Janet had never heard of before.

From Bangor they went to several places, some of them on the sea coast, some of them in the interior, but seldom stopping longer than a day in each. One evening when Janet went to her ladyship to obtain the next day's route, said the latter: "To-morrow we will go to Ben Dulas. If the place is like what it used to be, the accommodation is limited, consequently the servants may as well await our return here. Order an open carriage for nine to-morrow morning. We shall be one night away."

By a few minutes past nine next morning Lady Pollexfen and Miss Holme were on their way to Ben Dulas. The road was a rugged one, winding and ascending through a picturesque and hilly country for nearly a dozen miles. Habitations of any kind were few and far between, and the last mile or two of their journey was

through the wildest and most desolate tract of country that Janet had ever seen. Their road lay at the bottom of a narrow valley, but of a valley that stood high above the level of the sea. On both sides they were shut in by grey precipitous rocks that towered far above them, and which here and there were riven and smitten as if by some terrible throe of Nature in ages long gone by. At length this narrow valley debouched on to a small grassy plateau about a mile in circumference, which, in its turn, was shut in by hills still higher than those which had formed the walls of the valley. At the upper end of this plateau stood a grim moss-grown old building of considerable size, half farm house, half country inn. At this place they halted, and in answer to Janet's enquiries were told in broken English that they could be accommodated for the night.

Lady Pollexfen was in high good humour. "This place is changed the least of any that I remember as a girl," she said. "It might only have been yesterday that I was here, for any

difference that I can discern. Ah! what a happy time it was. But let us rest and have luncheon, and after that we will go and see the tarn of Ben Dulas."

So, when luncheon was over, and her ladyship was sufficiently rested, Janet rang the bell and, as instructed, asked for a guide to the tarn. The guide, who was indeed the landlord of the house, was ready in five minutes, and after waiting till her ladyship was duly shawled for the excursion, they set out, Lady Pollexfen and Janet being each mounted on a small sure-footed pony, while the guide trudged along on foot. The road they took was a gloomy and narrow defile that wound precipitously up among the further hills. It was scarcely wide enough for four pedestrians to walk along it shoulder to shoulder. Here and there the rocks on either hand overhung the road, so that a mere ribbon of sky could be seen between them. Here and there the road wound under rude archways that had been hewn out of the rock in years long gone by. The profound silence was broken

only by the clatter of their ponies' hoofs on the flinty roadway. Anything so desolate and lonely Janet had never seen. After journeying thus for a mile and a half they reached a small circular opening among the hills, in the middle of which, like a table of black steel, spread the darkling waters of Ben Dulas tarn.

"You can come for us in an hour," said Lady Pollexfen to the guide as she and Janet dismounted.

"Give me your arm, child," added her ladyship. Then they walked slowly down to the margin of the tarn, which was set about with thick coarse rushes, and seated themselves on two large boulders, as round and smooth as if they had been worn by the action of the waves for a thousand years.

The place was wild and desolate in the extreme. On every side it was shut in by great hills, bare, treeless, solemn—giants who for unnumbered ages had stood there with furrowed brows as if guarding the entrance to some holy place.

Janet had brought her sketching apparatus with her, but she sat without attempting to make use of it, overcome by the solemnity of the scene. When Lady Pollexfen spoke, the interruption was almost a relief.

"I daresay you have wondered, Miss Holme, what can be my motive for dragging you and myself about, with such apparent caprice, during the last fortnight. Not, indeed, that your wonder would be a matter of any moment either to me or to any one else," added her ladyship, ungraciously.

"And yet my madness, if you like to term it such, has not been without a method. The only idyl with which my life was ever beautified was enacted among the scenes which you and I have lately visited together. And at this spot, at this gloomy tarn of Ben Dulas, was enacted the crowning scene of all. On this very spot I first heard the sweet whisper of love, and from one whom I loved passionately in return, although my pride would not let me avow it. Yes, here, by the marge of this Avernian lake, he told me

that he loved me, that I was the star of his life, and that if I would only wait for him and promise to be his, he would carve for himself a name and a fortune that I should not be ashamed to share. I was young and handsome then, rich and admired, and I smiled Graham coldly down, although my heart was burning towards him. He went his way and I went mine. He went out as an explorer to the wilds of Africa, and was never heard of more. For me, I married a man rich and well-born, but whom I hated; and I gradually became the—well, the wretched being you see me now."

Her ladyship ceased. What could Janet say —what answer could she make to so strange a confession? Probably none was required. In any case, Janet sat without speaking, gazing with melancholy eyes into the black depths of the tarn. Lady Pollexfen, too, was silent. Janet glanced at her face. All its lines were fixed and stern. Her eyes seemed bent on the tops of the opposite hills, but they saw nothing unless it were some vision of inner things—some bit of

salvage rescued by memory from the wreck-strewn shores of the past.

They sat thus a long time without speaking, and were only disturbed at last by the approach of their guide with the ponies. In silence they rode back to the hotel.

All that evening Lady Pollexfen's thoughts seemed more abstracted than usual—farther away from the people and things immediately surrounding her. Still, she seemed cheerful and in good spirits, and after partaking of a light supper, she retired about ten o'clock. Janet sat with her till midnight, reading aloud Beckford's "Vathek." At twelve she was dismissed, and at once went to her own room, which was immediately adjoining that of her ladyship, the door of communication between the two rooms being kept open all night, so that Janet might be within hearing in case she were called.

Janet went off at once into the sound healthy sleep of the young.

The first grey light of dawn was just penetrating through the blinds when she awoke. The

instant she opened her eyes she jumped out of bed, under the vivid impression that Lady Pollexfen had called her. The well-known tones seemed ringing in her ears as she hurried out of her own room into that of her ladyship.

Without giving a single look round, she at once hurried to the bedside, and drew back the curtain with a gentle hand.

The light as yet was so faint and dim, that for a moment or two she did not realize the fact that the bed was without an occupant. She looked and looked, but no one was there.

Then she gazed round with startled eyes, half expecting to see Lady Pollexfen sitting in the easy-chair by the window. But she was not in the easy-chair by the window, nor in any of the other chairs, nor in the room at all, as Janet quickly ascertained.

It sent a shock to Janet's heart to see standing wide open the door which led into the corridor, and thence by a flight of stairs to the lower parts of the house.

Whither could her ladyship have gone? and what could be her motive for going at all? That she had been deceived in thinking she had been called, she now felt convinced. It was not the first time she had dreamt such a thing, although the impression had never been stamped so vividly on her brain before.

On instituting a more systematic search, she found that her ladyship must have completely dressed herself before leaving the room. Her bonnet had not been taken, but a grey waterproof cloak with a large hood was missing.

In five minutes from the time of her first awaking, Janet was equipped ready to start in search of Lady Pollexfen.

Had her ladyship been ten years younger, and in tolerable health, such a vagary could have concerned no one but herself. But she was so old and infirm, so subject to fits of prostration after any sudden excitement, that Janet could not but feel most seriously alarmed by her

unaccountable absence. Hurrying downstairs, she found that there were no signs of anyone belonging to the household having yet arisen. But the front door was unfastened and ajar. She opened it and passed out. The morning was brightening rapidly. The tops of the hills stood out clear and sharp against the intense blue of the sky, but here and there the lower spurs were still wrapped in mist. Janet looked anxiously around, but nowhere was there a soul to be seen. What should she do? Whither should she look for Lady Pollexfen?

These questions were still in her mind when she heard a heavy footstep descending the stairs inside the house. It was the landlord, their guide of the previous day, who was rising thus early. Janet was on the point of appealing to him, but he spoke first.

"Your mistress must be a queer old lady," he said, with a strong Welsh accent, "to be up this hour of the morning, and rambling over the hills all by herself. I saw her a while ago

from my bedroom window trotting along as comfortable as possible, and as if she had known the way from a child."

"In which direction was she going?" asked Janet, eagerly.

"Why, the road that we went yesterday; the road that leads to Ben Dulas tarn."

"Her ladyship is too weak and ill to come back on foot, and alone," said Janet. "I will hasten after her, and do you get out the ponies and follow as quickly as possible. I will engage that you shall be well remunerated for your trouble."

"In that case, miss, I'm at your service. I wont be five minutes behind you. A strange old lady, to be sure!"

Janet hurried off without another word, taking the narrow defile that led to the tarn. She ran with winged feet, and eyes that never swerved from their forward gaze. There was a vague sense of the beauty of the morning upon her, but her brain took in no distinct impressions of the time or the place.

At length she surmounted the last rise in the rocky road, and there before her lay the gloomy valley, peopled with dim shadows and fleecy fragments of mist. There, too, lay the steel-black waters of the lonely tarn.

Janet's eyes roving eagerly about rested before long on a dark huddled-up figure close to the margin of the lake. Anyone less sharp-sighted might have taken it for one of the grey boulder stones of which several were scattered about. But Janet was not deceived. She ran forward with a little cry, and stooping over the recumbent figure, tried to raise it in her arms. But she quickly found that this was beyond her strength. Lady Pollexfen could give her no assistance. She had been stricken with paralysis, and the use of her left side was entirely gone. Janet, however, contrived to raise her ladyship's head and shoulders so that they rested against her knee, and thus she awaited the arrival of the old guide.

"Is that you, child?" said Lady Pollexfen in a voice strangely broken and altered, as Janet

tried to lift her up. "If it had not been for you I think I should have been dead long ago; but now I know that my time is drawing near."

She spoke again with her head resting on Janet's knee. "Was it a token that came to me just as day was beginning to break? Or what was it? I cannot tell. I only know that when I woke up it was with Graham's voice sounding in my ears—I told you about Graham yesterday—as plainly as ever I heard the voice of anyone. I rose and dressed, and still the voice called me, seeming as if it came from a long distance and yet sounding quite close at hand, if you can understand such a thing. These were the words it said: 'Come! come! I am in trouble. You alone can give me ease. Come! and bring with you the Great Mogul Diamond.' These words were repeated over and over again, and each time my heart answered back: 'I am coming, dear love, I am coming.' Guided by the sound of the voice, I followed it down the staircase and out of the house, and along the

rocky defile until I reached the edge of the tarn. All the way the voice kept close before me, and I followed it without question or doubt. Only to hear those never-forgotten tones was to make me feel young and strong and a girl at heart again. When I reached the edge of the lake, my heart said, although I question whether the words framed themselves aloud on my lips—'How are you in trouble, Graham? And in what way can I help you?' 'I am a prisoner in the hands of the demon of this lake,' said the voice. 'He will keep me for a thousand years unless I shall be ransomed by one who loves me.' 'I love you, Graham. Tell me how I can ransom you,' I said. Then came the voice. 'Fling into the middle of the lake the rarest thing you have, and I shall be held captive no longer.' Then I knew why I had been told to bring the Great Mogul Diamond with me. 'Because of the love I have for you, your bidding shall be done,' I said. With that I kissed the Diamond once for the sake of my dead son, and then I flung it with all my strength

into the middle of the tarn. The moment the stone touched the water there fell upon my ear a strain of music so exquisitely sweet and joyful that I felt at once that Graham had been set free. And then I remember nothing more till I felt your arms round me trying to lift me up."

All this was spoken brokenly and with evident pain.

Janet was much shocked. "Are you sure, dear Lady Pollexfen, that you really threw the Diamond into the water?" she asked.

"As sure as ever I was of anything in my life," she answered. "Yes, the Diamond is gone, but I do not regret it. Had Graham said, 'Sacrifice your life to set me free,' I should have done it."

At this moment the guide came up with the two ponies. Janet explained to him as much as it was requisite that he should know. Then, between them, and with the aid of one of the ponies, they contrived to carry her ladyship slowly back to the inn. The local doctor was immediately sent

for, and Janet despatched a telegram to Chester for the best medical aid that city could afford. Another telegram summoned Major Strickland and Mr. Madgin. The local doctor looked upon Lady Pollexfen's case as a hopeless one from the first, and the greater authority when he came merely confirmed that opinion, although they both agreed in thinking she might possibly linger on for several months to come.

But Lady Pollexfen was saved from that. Her life gradually sank out and died, as a lamp dies, for lack of fuel. She was unconscious before the major and Mr. Madgin could reach Ben Dulas, and a few hours later she breathed her last.

Her last conscious words were addressed to Janet. "Child," she said, speaking in a thick troubled whisper, "I have been unjust to you, and now I regret it. I was too proud to let my love for you be seen, but you have been to me as the apple of my eye. You are my granddaughter, and Dupley Walls will be yours when I am gone. I have been unjust to you—I say

it again. Kiss me once, Janet, and tell me that you forgive me. Perhaps we shall meet again where no clouds intervene. Then you will know how truly I have loved you."

CHAPTER XV.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

Mr. Madgin was more like a madman than any reasonable being when Janet told him what had become of the Diamond. His first idea was to have it dived for in the same way that pearl oysters are obtained. But suppose the diver found it and hid it under his tongue, and came to the surface empty-handed? Then Mr. Madgin decided that he would employ a diving-bell, in which he and some man conversant with that peculiar business would go down together, and together they would search the bottom of the lake. But farther inquiry elicited the fact that the tarn was far too deep to allow of either of Mr. Madgin's plans being put in operation.

The country people averred that it had no bottom, or that if it had a bottom it was at such an extreme depth, that no soundings ever taken would succeed in reaching it. This Mr. Madgin declared to be all humbug, and at once proceeded to test the depth of the tarn with such rude appliances as he could command in that out-of-the-way spot. But with all Mr. Madgin's efforts he could not succeed in finding the bottom, and in so far the opinion of the country people proved to be correct. But Mr. Madgin was a man not easily defeated. He went up to London, only to reappear at Ben Dulas three days later with a couple of men and an apparatus nearly similar to that used for taking deep-sea soundings. With this apparatus the bottom of the tarn was at last found, but at a very great depth. After careful soundings over nearly the whole surface, and repeated careful examinations of the greased leaden cup, sent down for the purpose of obtaining specimens of the bottom, the chief of the two men in charge of the apparatus gave it as his opinion that the entire

under-water area was thickly covered with large boulders, similar to those which lined the margin of the tarn, and that consequently any small object which might sink to the bottom would almost be sure to find its way between the interstices of the stones, and would so be lost beyond any possible recovery from above. Reluctantly, and with a sad heart, Mr. Madgin at length gave orders to discontinue an attempt which had become so evidently hopeless. There, in the unsunned depths of the tarn of Ben Dulas, the Great Mogul Diamond still lies, and will doubtless continue to lie through ages yet unborn, till Time, working through one of his mighty cycles, shall again bring it to light, to shine, perchance, on the breast of some king, the foundations of whose empire are not yet laid, and for whom not even tradition shall have preserved the name of Aurengzebe the Great.

If it was a great surprise to Major Strickland, and such it undoubtedly was, to be told the story of the Mogul Diamond, so far as it was known to Mr. Madgin, it was an equal surprise to the

latter to find that Miss Holme was Lady Pollexfen's granddaughter, and the future mistress of Dupley Walls. He had never taken much notice of the quiet, pale young lady whom, since the illness and death of Sister Agnes, he had seen in attendance on Lady Pollexfen. He had a vague recollection of having been told by someone that Miss Holme was a very distant connexion of the family, but as it was a matter that seemed to have no bearing on his interests, he had never troubled himself further about it. But, behold, by one of those kaleidoscopic changes which occur oftener in real life than most people imagine, this mild-eyed young lady had stepped into the position of his mistress, a mistress in whose power it lay to deprive him at one stroke of two-thirds of his income—by severing the connexion which had existed for so many years between himself and Dupley Walls. Mr. Madgin was excessively chagrined to think that he had not had sufficient foresight to discern the aureole of coming greatness on the brow of Miss Holme. Like a wise man, he at once determined that nothing should

be lacking on his part to make himself an indispensable item of the new *régime*.

Lady Pollexfen's body was conveyed to Dupley Walls, and there buried—in accordance with her own written request—in the little church at the east end of the park. After the funeral her will was read aloud in the presence of all whom it concerned by Mr. Boulton, the family lawyer. Major Strickland was named as one executor, a certain Dr. Schofield, of London, was the other. With the exception of a few trifling legacies, "My granddaughter, Janet Fairfax, commonly known as Janet Holme," was made sole legatee. In addition to the mansion and estate of Dupley Walls, with sundry farms appertaining thereto, and a considerable quantity of house property in the parish of Tydsbury, the income of which in the aggregate amounted to about two thousand pounds a year; in addition to all this, Janet came in for Lady Pollexfen's accumulated savings during the last twenty years of her life. These savings, which were invested in scrip and shares of various kinds, amounted to the very comfor-

table sum of eighteen thousand pounds. Janet was placed under the sole guardianship of Major Strickland till she should reach the age of twenty-one. Meanwhile a liberal annual income was set aside for her use.

Dupley Walls being far too large for Janet's modest requirements, was shut up and left in charge of a couple of trusted servants, with Mr. Madgin to look after the whole. A pretty cottage *ornée* on the banks of the Thames, a few miles from London, was taken, and thither Janet went to live with Major Strickland and Aunt Felicité—a quaint, tender-hearted old lady, whom Janet had long ago learned to love dearly. Captain George Strickland was in lodgings in Bloomsbury, that he might be near the Museum. His "Narrative of Personal Adventure in India" was finished, and on the eve of publication. He was now engaged on a "Treatise on Fortification," and he spent a considerable part of his time in the Museum reading-room. He dined at the cottage once a week; but otherwise its inmates saw little or

nothing of him. Janet appreciated his delicacy, knowing well that it was on her account that he was not a more frequent visitor. She said nothing, but bided her time. No word of love had been spoken between Captain George and Janet when the latter was known to the world as a poor dependent of Lady Pollexfen, although both had felt intuitively how dear they were each to the other, and George had only waited for a favourable opportunity to press his suit. But now that Janet had become a person of wealth and consideration, George's pride fought with his love, and chained it down, and commanded it to be dumb for ever.

In his intercourse with Janet since she had come to live at the cottage, he was the Captain George of old times—but with a difference. His manner toward her was more guarded and ceremonious than of old; there was perhaps a shade more of deference, and just a touch of that quiet coldness which men who are at once proud and shy often put on when they are in the company of those whom they deem their superiors

in station. Janet smiled to herself and bided her time.

That time came about four months after Lady Pollexfen's death. On coming to the cottage one evening, Captain Strickland brought with him the news of his approaching departure from England. In the interests of the book on which he was engaged he was going to visit personally all the great fortifications of Europe. The time was mid-winter, and both his uncle and Janet endeavoured to persuade him to put off his contemplated journey till spring; but George was good-naturedly obdurate and would not give way to their wishes. The major's sister was not at home that evening, and later on the major himself was called downstairs on business. Janet and Captain George were left to their own devices. He was seated at the table absently turning over a book of photographs which he had seen a hundred times already; she was seated on an easy-chair near the fire, toying in an idle mood with a curious Chinese fan. Neither of them spoke for full five minutes after the major had left the

room. Janet was the first to break a silence that was becoming oppressive.

"Then you have really decided to start next week?" she said, looking shyly at Captain Strickland over the top of her fan.

"Yes—really decided," replied George. "I can get no further with my book till I have personally visited the places I wish to describe. Why rest here in idleness, waiting for pleasant weather? My uncle himself would be the first to scorn doing such a thing were the case his own."

Another pause and then another question in a voice hardly above a whisper. "Do you travel alone?"

"Alone? Yes. Where should I find anyone who would care to be my companion on such an erratic tour?"

Another pause. Then shyly but distinctly: "You might ask me to accompany you."

Captain Strickland gave a great start, and a sudden light leapt to his eyes as he turned them on Janet. Her blushing cheeks were hidden by

her fan, but over the top of it his eyes met hers, and in them he read something that love interpreted for him aright. In another moment he was on his knees by her side and smothering her hand with kisses.

As Janet afterwards explained to the Major: "You see, George would not propose to me. My money frightened him; so I was obliged to exercise the privilege which Leap Year gives our sex, and propose to him; and when once the ice was broken, I found him not at all shy."

The marriage did not take place till after the expiration of Janet's year of mourning. Then they went abroad, and did not return to England till Janet was turned one-and-twenty. Since that time Dupley Walls has been their home. The Major lives with them, and enjoys a green and hearty old age.

Janet has long known that it was her singular likeness to a younger sister of Lady Pollexfen, to whom the Major, when a young man, was engaged to be married, that made so deep an impression on the old soldier when he saw

her first, and that first endeared her to his heart.

Janet's relatives on her father's side were not slow in making advances to her when they discovered that she was Lady Pollexfen's heiress. Janet responded graciously enough, but she was not long in discovering that the new circle of connexions into which she had been introduced, was one in which she should never feel thoroughly at home. It was too worldly and too fast in every way to please Janet's simple tastes. Her new relations would gladly have taken her in hand with the view of educating her up to their standard, and would have found her some horseracing, gambling scion of the house for a husband. But any such pleasant family arrangement was rendered null and void by the simple fact of Janet choosing a husband for herself in the person of penniless Captain Strickland. Still they could not afford to give Janet up entirely. They find Dupley Walls a convenient visiting house during the dull season, and bashfulness being a quality unknown to any of the tribe, they do not fail,

when there, to make themselves thoroughly at home. Janet bears the infliction with much sweetness. She says that you cannot have aristocratic connexions without paying for the privilege in one shape or another.

It is scarcely necessary to state that Mr. Madgin's position at Dupley Walls was in no wise affected by the death of Lady Pollexfen. Janet is too fond of the old man to curtail even one of his privileges or emoluments; nor does she forget his great services in connexion with the recovery of the Diamond. Neither Mr. Madgin nor Captain Strickland has ever ventured to tell Janet that the man who stole the Diamond from M. Platzoff, and from whom it was afterwards recovered by means of a clever ruse, was none other than her own father. That is a passage of family history of which she still remains happily ignorant.

Madgin Junior is rising in his profession. He has a lucrative engagement at one of the West-end theatres. His rendering of the character of Doxy in the grand sensation drama of *From*

Belgravia to Newgate was highly spoken of by the press, and vociferously applauded by the pit. Madgin Junior being of a sanguine temperament, sees no reason why he should not in the course of time develope into a "star" of the first magnitude.

Mirpah the superb still remains unmarried, and will in all probability so remain till the end of the chapter. Several individuals have expressed a desire to take her for better or worse; but in each case Mirpah seemed to see the "worse" so clearly, and the "better" so indistinctly, that she declined the offers one and all. It is probable that no one so nearly touched her heart as Captain Ducie.

"Only think," she will sometimes say to her father, "had I been so minded, I might now have been stepmother to the present mistress of Dupley Walls!"

She still keeps her father's books and accounts, and as years creep over Mr. Madgin, so do Mirpah's labours increase. In those labours and in the hoarding of money, Mirpah Madgin, to all

appearance, finds the great happiness of her life.

Lady Pollexfen did not forget Sergeant Nicholas in her will. A comfortable annuity was settled on the old man. He resides in Tydsbury, and not unfrequently of an evening he goes to smoke a pipe with Mr. Madgin. At these meetings we may be certain that over and over again, in all its details, one or the other of them often tells the strange story of the Great Mogul Diamond.

THE END.

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